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# Coming Out from a Crisis: What Next?
# Sortir d'une crise : quelles sont les prochaines étapes?

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University of Alberta

**Marco Alberio**
Université du Québec à Rimouski

Welcome to the spring issue of ANSERJ! To say that it has been a challenging few months is quite the understatement. Earlier in the year, we were told to stay away from each other, both physically and socially. Benches and playgrounds were taped off to keep people out. Schools, universities and in general most social and economic activities suddenly stopped. The necessity and reality of distancing socially and physically were a negative consequence of the response to the pandemic, but they reminded us of the importance of belonging to something in periods of forced separation or crisis. As in no other recent crisis, political leaders and governments at every level took on a fundamental role, at least in the media. For over three months, we received daily press releases from government (federal, provincial and municipal) telling us who could go out (with or without a mask), as well as where and how. This situation brought us to a debate over democracy and its boundaries. Scholars and journalists have re-proposed ideas from such authors as Foucault on agency, inscription and control. Other scholars such as Adam Tooze (2020) have affirmed how the State has started playing a more consolatory role, since this demand for a lockdown came mainly from the bottom, namely from the people who saw a risk in being exposed to the virus.

C'est avec grand plaisir que nous vous présentons le numéro du printemps de la *Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OBNL et l'économie sociale* (ANSERJ). Dire que ces derniers mois ont été difficiles serait un euphémisme. À la mi-mars, on a commencé à nous dire de rester à l'écart les uns des autres, tant physiquement que socialement. Des bancs et des terrains de jeux ont été cloisonnés pour empêcher qu'ils soient utilisés. Les activités scolaires et universitaires ainsi que la plupart des activités sociales et économiques ont subitement cessé. La distanciation sociale et physique a été une conséquence négative de la réponse à la pandémie, mais cette distanciation nous a également rappelé l'importance d'un sentiment d'appartenance collective dans toute période de distanciation forcée ou de crise. *L'État et la politique*, ils ont émergé, du moins en apparence, comme des acteurs centraux durant cette crise. En effet, à tous les niveaux, les autorités et les gouvernements ont joué, du moins dans les médias, un rôle fondamental dans la gestion de la crise et ce plus que lors de n'importe quel autre événement récent. Pendant plus de trois mois, nous avons assisté à des points de presse quotidiens de la part de nos gouvernements (fédéral, provincial et municipal) qui, à chaque fois, nous indiquaient qui avait le droit de sortir, ainsi qu'où et comment sortir (avec ou sans masque). Cette pandémie a également lancé un débat sur la démocratie et ses limites. Des universitaires et des journalistes ont proposé des réflexions inspirées d'auteurs tels que Foucault,


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In any case, these last few months have also provided us with an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be healthy and part of a community. We are now at the point where the yellow tape and barriers are starting to no longer be necessary. At this stage, how can we build from the experience of the pandemic and encourage new structures and practices that transcend the status quo? Such a reflection is crucial if we recognize this crisis for what it is, as not only bringing to light the repercussions of a virus but also the negative impact of the oppressive social and economic structures connected to the traditional development model embraced by our societies.

Now that we are "opening," we can also wonder what comes next for social economy and non-profit organizations. The notion of innovation has taken on an enhanced sense of urgency to support greater social interactions and foster functional organizational change. Most notably, the pandemic has served to remind us of the importance and value of collaboration and cooperation. Indeed, together, we will need to seek out new ways of preparing for and responding to future challenges and to the new risks associated with the social, economic, and environmental transformations that have been forced upon us. It is our hope that this issue of ANSERJ can serve as a starting point to explore new approaches and perspectives so that we can prepare appropriately for the challenges that lie ahead.

In order to begin our exploration, we have three pieces in our "Perspectives for the Field" section that offer important insights for practitioners, academics and policy-makers. In the first piece, Cathy Barr provides some thoughts on a post-COVID-19 agenda for non-profit and

mettant en avant les concepts d'agence, d'inscription et de contrôle. D'autres, comme Adam Tooze (2020), ont affirmé que l'État a joué un rôle d'arbitre, puisque cette exigence de confinement est venue principalement de la base, c'est-à-dire de personnes qui ont perçu pour elles-mêmes un risque concret d'être exposées au virus.

Ces derniers mois nous ont aussi permis de réfléchir à la fois sur ce que cela signifie que d'être en bonne santé et de faire partie d'une communauté. Certaines barrières imposées pour obliger la distanciation sociale commencent maintenant à ne plus être nécessaires, et se font donc retirer progressivement. Dans les circonstances, comment pouvons-nous tirer parti de l'expérience de la pandémie et encourager de nouvelles structures et pratiques qui pourraient transformer le statu quo? Cette réflexion plus large est nécessaire si, au lieu de concevoir ces conséquences négatives comme le simple résultat d'une pandémie, nous reconnaissons que cette crise a mis en lumière des structures sociales et économiques inéquitables et oppressives liées à un modèle de développement traditionnel et probablement dépassé.

D'autre part, alors que nous sommes en train de « rouvrir », nous nous devons de nous questionner sur les impacts de cette crise structurelle sur l'économie sociale et les organismes à but non lucratif. Durant la crise, la notion d'innovation a pris un caractère d'urgence accru dans le but de soutenir les interactions sociales afin de favoriser un changement organisationnel et social efficace. La pandémie nous a notamment rappelé l'importance et la valeur de la collaboration et de la coopération. Ensemble, nous devrons en effet trouver de nouvelles réponses aux défis à venir ainsi qu'aux nouveaux risques associés aux transformations sociales, économiques et environnementales. Nous souhaitons que ce numéro de la *Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OSBL et l'économie sociale* puisse servir de point de départ pour explorer de nouvelles approches et perspectives afin de mieux nous préparer pour les défis qui nous attendent.

En vue d'entamer ce travail exploratoire, nous présentons trois articles dans notre section « Perspectives pour le terrain » qui fournissent des points de vue intéressants pour les praticiens, les universitaires et les décideurs politiques. Cathy Barr présente ses idées sur un programme de


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social economy research. Sylvain Lefèvre presents a perspective on a possible response to the pandemic in his piece entitled “L’architecture collective des solidarités à l’épreuve de la COVID-19” (“The Collective Architecture of Solidarities Against COVID-19”). In the third piece, Kunle Akingbola looks at the matter of human resource management in non-profits during this time of change. Much has been learned over these last few months, and now we need to decide how to proceed.

In this issue, we also have four feature articles that were written and developed before COVID-19. Even so, these contributions make it clear to the reader how the current crisis is inscribed within a long-term trajectory in which institutions, communities and other actors have already identified certain challenges and, despite several obstacles, have tried to implement innovative responses. The first article, by Peter Milley and Barbara Szijarto, investigates the factors associated with universities that support social innovation. The second piece, by Christian Jetté and Jean-Vincent Bergeron-Gaudin, analyzes three case studies showing the role of social economy and community actors in developing institutions and their practices. In their analysis, the authors also highlight the risks associated with this process. The third article, by Gayle Broad and Jude Ortiz, examines an innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem that demonstrates the need to engage in partnerships. The fourth article, by Anthony Piscitelli and Sean Geobey, reframes the ongoing challenge of how boards can best represent the interests of their members.

The articles presented in this issue remind us of the complexity associated with efforts to bring people together for the public good. The various authors provide us with ideas and insights on what to look forward to now that our economies and society are beginning to reopen. Their ground-breaking research and thinking will inform decision-making policy and practice as we move beyond the pandemic. We conclude with a reminder: if you have not done so yet, please register on the site so that you can receive the latest information and announcements about the journal. Note in this regard that,

recherche post-COVID-19 pour les organismes à but non lucratif et l’économie sociale. Sylvain Lefèvre traite de réponses possibles à la pandémie dans son article « L’architecture collective des solidarités à l’épreuve de la COVID-19 ». Dans un troisième article, Kunle Akingbola se penche sur la question de la gestion des ressources humaines dans les organismes à but non lucratif en cette période de changement. Nous avons beaucoup appris lors de ces derniers mois, et nous devons maintenant décider de la marche à suivre.

Dans ce numéro, nous vous proposons en outre quatre articles de fond écrits et développés avant la diffusion de la COVID-19. Ces contributions montrent néanmoins combien la crise actuelle s’inscrit dans une trajectoire à plus long terme qui avait déjà été entamée avant la crise, dans laquelle les institutions, les communautés et les autres acteurs avaient identifié certains défis et avaient tenté de mettre en œuvre des réponses innovantes, malgré plusieurs obstacles. Le premier article, de Peter Milley et Barbara Szijarto, examine les facteurs expliquant l’innovation sociale dans les universités. Le deuxième article, de Christian Jetté et Jean-Vincent Bergeron-Gaudin, analyse trois études de cas qui montrent le rôle des acteurs de l’économie sociale et des communautés dans le développement des institutions et de leurs pratiques. Ce faisant, les auteurs soulignent les risques associés à un tel processus. Le troisième article, de Gayle Broad et Jude Ortiz, examine un écosystème entrepreneurial innovateur qui souligne la nécessité de s’engager dans des partenariats. Le dernier article, rédigé par Anthony Piscitelli et Sean Geobey, traite du défi persistant concernant la façon dont les conseils d’administration représentent les intérêts de leurs membres.

Les articles présentés dans ce numéro nous rappellent la complexité des efforts visant à rassembler les gens autour d’actions collectives pour le bien public. Les divers auteurs nous donnent un aperçu de ce à quoi nous pouvons nous attendre maintenant que nos économies et notre société commencent à redémarrer. Il s’agit de recherches et de réflexions plutôt innovantes qui pourraient influencer les politiques et pratiques décisionnelles à mesure que nous sortons de la pandémie. Sur un autre sujet, si vous ne l’avez pas déjà fait, nous vous rappelons la possibilité de vous inscrire à notre liste de diffusion sur notre site internet afin de


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for ANSERJ, there will be some exciting developments over the next few years. Also, we always welcome your feedback and suggestions. In conclusion, we hope that you enjoy the issue!

## NOTE FROM JORGE SOUSA, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It is my pleasure to announce the arrival of our new co-editor, Marco Alberio, Canada Research Chair in Social Innovation and Territorial Development at the Université du Québec à Rimouski (UQAR). He brings to us a wealth of experience in research on social innovation and territorial development, and he will provide a vital international perspective to the journal. Welcome to ANSERJ, Marco!

## REFERENCE

Tooze, Adam. (2020, May). We are living through the first economic crisis of the Anthropocene. *The Guardian.com.* URL: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/07/we-are-living-through-the-first-economic-crisis-of-the-anthropocene

recevoir les toutes dernières informations et annonces sur la revue. Notez que des développements, qu'on souhaite être intéressants, auront lieu au cours des prochaines années dans la revue de l'ANSERJ. De plus, nous tenons à vous rappeler que vos commentaires et suggestions sont toujours les bienvenus. En guise de conclusion, nous espérons que vous aimerez le présent numéro. Bonne lecture!

## NOTE DU RÉDACTEUR EN CHEF, JORGE SOUSA

J'ai le plaisir de vous annoncer l'arrivée de notre nouveau co-rédacteur, Marco Alberio, titulaire de la Chaire de recherche du Canada en innovation sociale et développement des territoires à l'Université du Québec à Rimouski (UQAR). Il apporte avec lui une riche expérience sur la recherche en innovation sociale et en développement territorial. Il contribuera aussi une perspective internationale essentielle à la revue. Cher Marco, bienvenue à la *Revue canadienne de recherche sur les OBNL et l'économie sociale* (ANSERJ)!

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Tooze, Adam. (2020, May). We are living through the first economic crisis of the Anthropocene. *The Guardian.com*. URL: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/07/we-are-living-through-the-first-economic-crisis-of-the-anthropocene


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# A Post-COVID-19 Agenda for Nonprofit and Social Economy Research

**Cathy Barr**
Imagine Canada

## ABSTRACT

This article outlines six areas of research that would help Canada's social purpose sector recover and move forward from the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the sector needs big picture thinking about its role in a post-pandemic world. Second, it needs research on the needs currently being met—or left unmet—by social purpose organizations. Third, it needs research that helps social purpose organizations measure and communicate their value and impact. Fourth, researchers could examine the sector's advocacy efforts during the pandemic and the results of these efforts. Fifth, there is a need for research on the larger ecosystem in which social purpose organizations operate. Finally, the pandemic presents an opportunity to study how different organizations responded to a crisis and to learn from their experiences.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article décrit six objectifs de recherche qui pourraient aider le secteur à vocation sociale à se rétablir et à progresser à la suite de la pandémie du COVID-19. Premièrement, il faut développer une vision globale sur le rôle que peut jouer ce secteur dans un monde post-pandémique. Deuxièmement, il faut effectuer des recherches sur les besoins que les organismes à vocation sociale peuvent—ou ne peuvent pas—rencontrer. Troisièmement, il faut aussi effectuer des recherches qui aideraient les organismes à vocation sociale à évaluer et à communiquer leur propre valeur et leur impact. Quatrièmement, les chercheurs devraient analyser les plaidoyers du secteur pendant la pandémie et quels étaient leurs effets. Cinquièmement, il faut examiner l'écosystème dans lequel les organismes à vocation sociale agissent. Sixièmement, il serait pertinent d'étudier comment diverses organisations ont géré la crise afin que l'on puisse apprendre de leurs expériences.

**Keywords / Mots clés** Charities; Nonprofits; Social economy; Research agendas; COVID-19 / Organismes de bienfaisance; Organismes sans but lucratif; Économie sociale; Programmes de recherche; COVID-19

## INTRODUCTION

The world is currently facing an unprecedented and unanticipated crisis that is likely to affect individuals, communities, and nations in ways we cannot yet even begin to imagine. In the first four months of 2020, almost four million people


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worldwide contracted COVID-19 and more than a quarter of a million died of it. In Canada, there were more than sixty thousand confirmed cases and more than four thousand deaths. To limit the spread of the virus, nations closed their borders and shuttered their economies and societies to an extent never seen before. Of course, charities, nonprofits, and social enterprises have not been immune to the effects of the pandemic. Although the full impact of the crisis will likely not be known for many years, the early evidence suggests that the sector will be forever changed. Scholars who study nonprofit organizations and the social economy have an important role to play in helping sector leaders and policymakers understand what has happened, what can be learned from it, and how to plot a route forward, not just to recovery but to a stronger, more resilient future. This short article offers some areas of research that will be valuable for those trying to navigate through and beyond these uncertain times.

## THE IMMEDIATE IMPACT OF COVID-19

In late April, Imagine Canada surveyed 1,458 charity leaders to determine some of the immediate impacts of COVID-19 on the sector (Lasby, 2020). The survey found that 69 percent of charities were experiencing a decrease in revenues. This is more than twice the percentage of organizations that reported decreased revenues following the 2008 economic downturn. The average revenue decline was also much larger than it was in 2008–2009: 31 percent compared to less than one percent. Moreover, virtually all revenue streams have been affected. This will make the dominant strategy charities used to cope in 2008–2009—making up lost revenue from one source by turning to other sources—much more challenging today.

Declining revenues are, of course, just a leading indicator of the impact the pandemic will have on charities and nonprofits, the people they employ, and the people and causes they serve. By late April, 30 percent of charities with paid staff had already experienced lay-offs, and 27 percent had reduced staff hours. And this is likely just the beginning. More than half of surveyed organizations said there may be lay-offs coming, either on top of the ones that have already occurred or as a new measure to cope with declining revenues. Most charities have also been forced to make changes to their programs. More than half had transitioned in-person programs online or increased their emphasis on existing online programs, while 42 percent said they had developed entirely new programs in response to the pandemic. And future programming is tenuous. Forty-five percent of leaders expect their organizations' financial situation to worsen over the next three to six months, and a further 17 percent said they do not know what future holds for them.

## WHAT CAN SCHOLARS DO?

Imagine Canada's survey (Lasby, 2020) explored only the most immediate and visible impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on one segment of Canada's large social purpose sector.[1] The full impact of the pandemic on the sector and society will not be understood for many years, perhaps decades. This represents a major opportunity—and a major responsibility—for those who study charities, nonprofits, and the social economy. The sector needs practical, relevant, and engaged scholarship now more than ever before. Society needs scholars to help it recover and move forward to build the kind of country most Canadians want: a country that takes care of its vulnerable citizens; a country that combines economic prosperity with environmental responsibility; a country where people give, volunteer, and participate in civic life; and a country where charities, nonprofits, and social enterprises are considered as essential to society as restaurants, liquor stores, and hair salons.

So, if you study this sector, you may want to take a good look at your current research agenda and ask yourself this very important question: Is my research going to make a difference in a post-pandemic world? If you are concerned that it might not, you are not sure, or you just need some inspiration, this article outlines six areas of research that are crucially important. Each of these areas contains thousands of potential individual research projects that could be of interest to


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scholars in many different disciplines, so please share these ideas widely. The world is being reshaped, and Canada's charities, nonprofits, and social enterprises have an important role to play. But if they are going to do that, they need good research.

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL PURPOSE ORGANIZATIONS IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

To start at the most macro level, there is a need for some serious big picture thinking about the role of social purpose organizations in a post-pandemic world. These organizations could be important players in the creation of a greener, more sustainable, and more equitable society, but they are generally left out of the discussion, at least at the national and international level. If they are thought of at all, it is usually after all the major decisions have been made and they are typically seen as organizations that could deliver pre-determined "supports" more cheaply than government and/or cater to individuals and communities that businesses have no interest in serving (e.g., the poorest, youngest, oldest, most troubled, most remote, etc.). Research that demonstrates the role, value, and contributions of charities, nonprofits, and social enterprises to Canadian life is desperately needed, along with data, stories, and arguments that make local, provincial, and national decision-makers sit up and take notice.

## MEASURING AND COMMUNICATING NEED

There is a dearth of macro-level research on how social purpose organizations are meeting the challenges that result from economic disruption, a deteriorating environment, ever-more-rapid changes in technology, an ageing population, and growing income inequality, issues that most likely have been, or will be, exacerbated by the pandemic. What needs are social purpose organizations meeting that are not being met by governments or businesses? What needs are they unable to meet because of inadequate resources, outdated legal and regulatory frameworks, or other structural or attitudinal issues? What groups are presently well served and poorly served? What has changed as a result of the pandemic, and what may change in the future? What are the likely consequences of failing to adequately support these organizations?

## MEASURING AND COMMUNICATING VALUE, IMPACT, INNOVATION, AND PRODUCTIVITY

There is a need for research that helps social purpose organizations measure and communicate their individual value and impact, and research that explores how to measure the innovation and productivity of the sector as a whole. Research could and should also be done on ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness. This work is key to helping social purpose organizations continue to deliver their missions in a rapidly changing world. It is also key to reshaping outdated opinions about the role and value of the sector vis-à-vis business and to overcoming counterproductive attitudes about overhead, surpluses, competence, and professionalism. These attitudes have been hurting social purpose organizations for years and have contributed to the challenges they are facing as a result of the pandemic.

## PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY

As soon as the pandemic hit, leaders of social purpose organizations across the country mobilized to ensure that governments at all levels considered the needs of their organizations and clients in their policy responses. These efforts met with some success in the early weeks of the pandemic. Charities, nonprofits, and social enterprises were, for example, included in the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, and the federal government established the Emergency Community Support Fund for organizations delivering essential services to vulnerable populations. Sector leaders faced an uphill battle, however, in getting decision-makers to understand the unique challenges faced by their organizations and to understand that the sector is more than a conduit to deliver services to those in need. Recording and analyzing these efforts and their results would be an extremely useful line of research.


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## ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH

Canada's charities, nonprofits, and social enterprises exist within a large but also disjointed and underdeveloped ecosystem that includes foundations, philanthropists, and investors; allied professionals, such as lawyers, accountants, fundraisers, consultants, and advisors of all types; a wide range of capacity-building, umbrella, intermediary, and infrastructure organizations; rating and accreditation bodies; and researchers, educators, and related institutions. There are also many local, regional, provincial, national, and international networks that seek to support the sector and advocate on its behalf. Research that helps us understand this ecosystem better would be invaluable at this time. What parts of it are working well? What parts are failing? Where are the gaps? Ultimately, what is needed to make the system healthy, vibrant, and resilient?

## ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

Finally, the pandemic presents a unique opportunity to study how individual organizations of all sizes and types responded to the crisis and to learn from their experiences. The list of research ideas here is almost endless. How did different organizations adapt and how successful (or not) were they? What leadership, governance, fundraising, financial management, and human resources practices helped and hindered organizational responses? How did nonprofits respond differently than businesses? How will the pandemic change organizational practices? What made some organizations more resilient than others, and what can we learn from that to build stronger and more resilient organizations—and a stronger, more resilient sector?

## CONCLUSION: WE NEED SCALE

More than anything, the social purpose sector needs large-scale, high-quality, multi-year, multi-disciplinary, macro-level research. It needs research that helps policymakers better understand the sector and the role it can play in creating a more sustainable and equitable future. It needs research that helps sector leaders understand how they can fulfill their organizational missions more effectively in challenging and uncertain times. This requires funding. It requires collaboration. It requires long-term planning and committed execution. Are you up to the challenge? Will you help us?

## NOTE

1. This term is used to refer to the sector that includes charities, nonprofits, and social enterprises.

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Lasby, David. (2020). Imagine Canada's sector monitor: Charities & the COVID-19 pandemic. Toronto, ON: Imagine Canada. URL: https://imaginecanada.ca/sites/default/files/COVID-19%20Sector%20Monitor%20Report%20ENGLISH_0.pdf [May 7, 2020].

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR / L'AUTEUR

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# L'architecture collective des solidarités à l'épreuve de la COVID-19

**Sylvain A. Lefèvre**
UQAM, CRISES

## ASTRACT

The global health crisis linked to COVID-19 is putting our healthcare and economic systems to the test while also challenging the architecture of the social ties that connect us with each other, our way of "making society." Parallels with the hygienist period of a century ago can aid us in seeing the interconnections between philanthropic initiatives and public regulations. Indeed, yesterday and today, the combination of a health crisis and an economic depression brings us to consider the value of life and the price of death. How are we to make these collective choices, for now and for the "world of after," in a democracy of confinement?

## RÉSUMÉ

La crise sanitaire mondiale liée à la COVID-19 met à l'épreuve nos systèmes de santé et économiques mais aussi l'architecture des liens sociaux qui nous lient les uns aux autres, la manière de « faire société ». Les parallèles avec la période hygiéniste, il y a un siècle, sont éclairants pour saisir le lien entre dynamiques philanthropiques et régulations publiques. Car hier comme aujourd'hui, l'articulation d'une crise sanitaire et d'une dépression économique amène à considérer la valeur des vies et le prix des morts. Mais comment faire ces choix collectifs, pour maintenant et aussi pour « le monde de l'après », dans une démocratie confinée?

**KEYWORDS / MOTS CLÉS** Coronavirus; Economic depression; Hygienist period; Philanthropy; Welfare State / Coronavirus; Dépression économique; Période hygiéniste; Philanthropie; État social

## RETOUR VERS LE FUTUR : IL Y A UN SIÈCLE, L'HYGIÉNISME

Sur le plan de la philanthropie, on peut relever de nombreuses ressemblances entre la recomposition des solidarités qui s'amorce aujourd'hui et la grande période hygiéniste en Amérique du Nord (du milieu du 19e siècle jusqu'au début du 20e). Les grandes épidémies de tuberculose—un quart des enfants touchés à New York au début du siècle—furent des catastrophes sanitaires qui ont marqué toute la société. Comme aujourd'hui, leur propagation était liée à un mode de


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production (concentration du prolétariat dans les villes de l'ère l'industrielle) et à des problèmes environnementaux (circulation de l'air et de l'eau). Pour y faire face, les élites politiques et les patrons philanthropes ont engagé un ensemble de réformes, aidés par des médecins et des urbanistes : prophylaxie, sanatoriums, réseaux d'égouts, collecte des ordures, etc.[1] Mais cette mobilisation a aussi été marquée par la mise en place de réseaux de solidarité très importants : structuration de la philanthropie par la création des grandes fondations, innovations sociales comme les « caisses de communauté » (l'ancêtre de Centraide), et surtout de grandes campagnes de dons populaires. En 1905, 5 000 États-Uniens sont impliqués dans la prévention de la tuberculose; ils sont 500 000 en 1915. Au même moment, à Montréal, tandis que les ouvriers mettent en place des caisses mutualistes, J.W. McConnell s'engage dans les grandes campagnes philanthropiques, avec pour acmé la création de sa fondation en 1937. On a donc dans un premier temps un âge d'or de la philanthropie. Celle-ci est même érigée en paradigme politique aux États-Unis sous le gouvernement Hoover, qui promeut « l'État associatif », le localisme, les réseaux d'entraide et la société civile comme charpente de l'action publique.

Or quand la Grande Dépression frappe en 1929, toute cette structure philanthropique s'effondre violemment, sous l'effet d'une très forte augmentation des besoins et d'une baisse des ressources des organismes. Entre 1929 et 1932, faute d'argent, plus d'un tiers des institutions charitables disparaissent aux États-Unis (Zunz, 2012, p. 133). Face à l'explosion de la pauvreté, ce n'est pas la charité et les réseaux philanthropiques, mais le *New Deal* de Roosevelt qui va s'imposer, par la mise à l'avant-plan de l'État non seulement social, mais aussi économique, et la relégation au second plan des réseaux philanthropiques (Zunz, 2012, pp. 135-146; Bielefeld et Chu, 2010, pp. 158-181). Ajoutons que ce sont les deux guerres mondiales (dont la première est immédiatement suivie par la « grippe espagnole », qui fit entre 50 et 100 millions de morts à l'échelle internationale [Peyrat, 2020]) qui ont aussi accentué le périmètre de l'État social, avec la mise en place d'une fiscalité adaptée et de politiques publiques importantes.

## DE LA CRISE SANITAIRE À LA RÉCESSION ÉCONOMIQUE : LA VALEUR DES VIES ET LE PRIX DES MORTS

Si l'on trace un parallèle avec aujourd'hui, il faut souligner que la période actuelle a été marquée par un engagement fort de l'État sur le plan sanitaire et socioéconomique, mais aussi par un foisonnement d'initiatives solidaires et philanthropiques, notamment au niveau local. L'entraide s'est déployée en soutien aux plus fragiles, notamment les ainé.es, et aussi au moyen de gestes de solidarité envers le personnel soignant. D'autre part, les grandes fondations ont réagi assez rapidement, à la fois en relayant les consignes et dispositifs gouvernementaux, en appuyant les initiatives locales et en soutenant les réseaux communautaires, y compris par des fonds d'urgence (Grant-Poitras, Alalouf-Hall et Fontan, 2020; Pole, 2020). Parallèlement, le gouvernement, au niveau provincial et fédéral, a fait appel à la générosité des particuliers, en les enjoignant à donner du sang et à faire du bénévolat dans les organismes communautaires et dans les centres pour aîné.es. La séquence actuelle est donc marquée par une sorte d'union transversale entre philanthropie et pouvoirs publics autour d'une sauvegarde des vies à tout prix.

Quid de la séquence à venir pour la philanthropie et les solidarités collectives? De nombreux articles économiques nous mettent en garde contre la dépression économique qui nous guette et qui risque d'être aussi forte que celle de 1929 (Touitou, 2020). D'ores et déjà, Imagine Canada évalue la perte financière à cause de la COVID-19 pour les organismes de bienfaisance de 10 à 15 milliards de dollars, et demande la mise sur pied d'un fonds d'urgence de 8 milliards de dollars à Ottawa (Bendali, 2020). Non seulement les grands donateurs et entreprises qui planifient leurs dons vont très probablement revoir à la baisse leurs prévisions devant l'incertitude de cette grande dépression, mais le bénévolat—pierre angulaire du monde communautaire et de l'entraide—est mis à mal par les mesures de distanciation physique. De l'autre côté, la crise sanitaire rend visibles des vulnérabilités et accroît des inégalités déjà très fortes. Parallèlement, tant les dépenses publiques engagées actuellement par les gouvernements que les manques à gagner liés à la dépression à venir annoncent des réaménagements fiscaux majeurs. C'est aussi l'expérimentation, *via* la PCU (Prestation canadienne


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d'urgence), d'un revenu déconnecté du travail, qui relance la réflexion déjà ancienne sur la nécessité d'un revenu de base universel. Enfin, après un engouement collectif pour « aplanir la courbe » et pour la maintenir sous « la droite » des capacités d'accueil de nos systèmes de santé, des voix se font entendre pour souligner que cette « droite » n'est pas une donnée graphique immuable, mais le résultat de choix collectifs. À ce titre, nous payons actuellement la note des coupes budgétaires dans les services sociaux et sanitaires des dernières décennies, par la gestion à flux tendu pour éviter les stocks (notamment de masques) et par la précarisation des conditions de travail du personnel soignant (Grenier et Bourque, 2019). Les économies d'alors se révèlent bien coûteuses aujourd'hui. En somme, plusieurs tendances pointent vers de profondes transformations de nos mécanismes de solidarité collective.

Pour ne prendre qu'un exemple, le sort fait aux personnes âgées dans les CHSLD suscite des indignations croissantes (Derfel, 2020). Par-delà ces élans du cœur fort légitimes et les récriminations portées contre tel ou tel propriétaire négligent, ce sont des questions plus structurelles qui se posent. Qui doit prendre en charge les aîné.es? L'État, *via* un service public financé par l'impôt? Le marché, *via* une offre lucrative et concurrentielle? L'entraide, *via* la place croissante prise par les proches aidants? (Au Québec, près d'un quart de la population, majoritairement des femmes, remplit déjà la fonction de proche aidante, et les projections démographiques pourraient rendre cette proportion bien plus importante [Dumais, 2018].) L'État, le marché et l'entraide ensemble, mais selon quel dosage et quels arbitrages collectifs? On saisit à quel point le *welfare mix* actuel est mis à l'épreuve par la crise sanitaire au niveau politique, économique, mais aussi moral.

## COMMENT FAIRE DES CHOIX COLLECTIFS POUR « LE MONDE DE L'APRÈS » DANS UNE DÉMOCRATIE CONFINÉE?

Les bouleversements actuels annoncent donc de grandes recompositions dans l'architecture des solidarités. Le temps de l'urgence voit l'État reprendre un rôle central, à la fois par sa main gauche (soigner, protéger) et sa main droite (ordonner, punir)—y compris des gouvernements plus enclins depuis des années à valoriser la main invisible du marché—tandis que le réseau communautaire et les acteurs philanthropiques jouent un rôle de soutien (voire de maintien) des solidarités et de l'entraide en période de « distanciation sociale ». Mais quelle sera la place de chacun de ces acteurs dans la « grande dépression » à venir? Les scénarios actuels apparaissent très ouverts. Si, pour un « monde de l'après », certains États s'engagent sur la voie d'un revenu de base (plus ou moins universel), évoquent des renationalisations et réhabilitent le « prendre soin » comme impératif collectif, les structures économiques, politiques et sociales du « monde d'avant » ne seront pas pour autant démantelées. Elles peuvent même trouver dans la situation actuelle des occasions de se réinventer, à l'instar du capitalisme algorithmique (Durand Folco, 2020). De même, la relocalisation économique et le repli nationaliste peuvent être funestes pour les solidarités envers les populations plus lointaines, notamment pour des pays du Sud qui risquent de souffrir très fortement, autant de la COVID-19 que de la grande dépression à venir. Nancy Fraser nous rappelle avec raison que les mécanismes de protection sociale ont beau avoir leur versant d'émancipation, ils ont aussi leur versant de domination quand ils orientent certains vers le marché de l'emploi et certaines vers l'espace domestique, qu'ils dessinent des frontières plus ou moins rigides entre « nous » (les ayants droit) et « eux » (les autres), etc. (Fraser, 2010). Enfin l'articulation entre la crise sanitaire et la dépression économique qui s'annonce amène certains à justifier des logiques sacrificielles par des calculs comptables sur la valeur des vies (et des morts) (Vailles, 2020).

On saisit donc à quel point la situation actuelle pose un défi (avec sa part d'ombre et d'espoir) pour « rebâtir la société »; les recompositions de son architecture peuvent être vigoureuses, comme nous le rappelle le début du 20e siècle. Or les choix actuels se déroulent dans une « démocratie confinée », où les gouvernements justifient leurs décisions par des impératifs sanitaires, des contraintes d'urgence et des cadrages scientifiques qui suspendent toute mise en débat. Les activités parlementaires sont, sauf exception, gelées et les partis d'opposition inaudibles ou aphones. Les syndicats sont


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déstabilisés par la situation relativement inédite dans le monde du travail : activités économiques en pause, chômage massif mais pour l'instant en partie compensé financièrement, télétravail généralisé brouillant la dichotomie travail/hors travail, travailleurs précaires d'habitude invisibilisés et peu rémunérés dont on découvre aujourd'hui la centralité. Les mouvements sociaux sont atomisés par la distanciation physique et la rue interdite. En somme, un état d'exception, à l'image des gouvernements de guerre, dans lequel la délibération démocratique est suspendue. Alors comment « déconfiner la démocratie » à l'heure de prendre collectivement des décisions décisives pour l'architecture de nos solidarités?

Pour les chercheur.es, un des enjeux est sans doute de faire valoir que l'activité scientifique doit nourrir le débat démocratique et non le clore. Or, la parole experte est souvent présentée depuis le début de la crise de la COVID-19 comme ayant sa sphère autonome, où une vérité d'autorité s'érige, tandis qu'en parallèle la sphère politique serait celle du choix et du débat. Or, au-delà de l'appui sur le savoir spécialisé épidémiologique et d'une décision politique par les élus, les discussions sur le déconfinement, pour ne prendre qu'un exemple, ne nécessiteraient-elles pas d'autres éclairages scientifiques et sociaux afin de garantir une mise en débat féconde? En sciences sociales, quels devraient être les apports, pour envisager un tel processus, des sociologues sur les dynamiques du lien social, des politistes sur les dispositifs d'action publique, des géographes sur la dimension territoriale (pour ne prendre que quelques exemples)? Et du point de vue social, quelles voix prêter aux syndicats, ou encore aux organismes communautaires qui connaissent parfois au plus près les populations fragiles (femmes isolées ou menacées, itinérants, enfants en danger, immigrants sans papiers)? Parce que la situation est urgente et relève d'un enjeu de santé, le croisement des savoirs devrait-il être suspendu? Au contraire, selon un ouvrage de M. Callon, P. Lascoumes et Y. Barthe, publié il y a vingt ans. Cet ouvrage, *Agir dans un monde incertain*, plaide pour la mise en place de « forums hybrides » pour affronter des controverses sociotechniques comme celles que nous connaissons actuellement. Il y a là une piste pour déconfiner la démocratie et la science afin de produire une véritable démocratie sanitaire, tout en donnant un rôle aux organismes communautaires et mouvements sociaux, garants du *care* mais aussi producteurs de connaissances et relayeurs des aspirations de la société civile, y compris de ses franges les plus invisibilisées et les plus inaudibles. C'est aussi à condition de lutter dès maintenant contre ces injustices épistémiques que le « monde de l'après » pourra réduire les injustices sociales.

## NOTE

1. Sur ces alliances réformatrices en France, voir Topalov, 1999.

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# COVID-19: The Prospects for Nonprofit Human Resource Management

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the impacts of COVID-19 on nonprofit employees and human resource management (HRM). The pandemic is wreaking havoc on people's health and well-being and threatening the primary institutions that support the functioning of society. For nonprofits, COVID-19 is a call to action at many levels. As the devasting impacts of the pandemic evolve, nonprofits have continued to provide essential services and help the vulnerable. At the same time, the impacts of COVID-19 portend serious and potentially crippling strains on nonprofits, which are already overstretched. Since the context in which nonprofits operate is critical to their effectiveness and the outcomes of their employment relations, the impacts of COVID-19 could shape nonprofit HRM and employees' ability to assist people.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore les perspectives de COVID-19 pour les employés à but non lucratif et la gestion des ressources humaines. L'ampleur de la pandémie fait des ravages sur la santé et le bien-être des personnes et menace les principales institutions qui soutiennent le fonctionnement de la société. Pour les associations, COVID-19 est un appel à l'action à plusieurs niveaux. Alors que les effets dévastateurs de la pandémie évoluent, les organismes sans but lucratif ont continué de fournir des services essentiels et d'aider les personnes vulnérables de la communauté. Dans le même temps, les impacts de COVID-19 présagent des tensions graves et potentiellement paralysantes sur les organisations à but non lucratif déjà surchargées. Étant donné que l'environnement est essentiel à l'efficacité des organisations à but non lucratif et à leurs relations d'emploi, les impacts de COVID-19 pourraient façonner la GRH à but non lucratif et la capacité d'aider les communautés, les personnes et leur organisation.

**Keywords / Mots clés** COVID-19; Nonprofit HRM; Nonprofit Employees; Nonprofit Change / COVID-19; GRH à but non lucratif; Employés à but non lucratif; Changement à but non lucratif

## INTRODUCTION

Nonprofits play a critical role in helping the community to mitigate and solve problems at different levels and dimensions (Miller-Stevens, Taylor, & Morris, 2015; Smith & Phillips, 2016). Even after the problem-solving process is in full swing, nonprofits are adept at pivoting to help the community adapt to change. The COVID-19 pandemic is without a doubt a


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problem of unimaginable scale that requires nonprofits to deploy their core competencies and capabilities to assist the community. The way nonprofits manage their human resources (HR) is critical to achieving this objective.

This article explores the impacts of COVID-19 on nonprofit employees and human resource management (HRM). It links current reports on the pandemic to research in order to address two overarching questions: What are the major impacts of COVID-19 on nonprofit employees? How would the impacts influence the direction of nonprofit human resource management (NHRM)? It is important for nonprofit practitioners and researchers to understand these impacts in order to address emergent and heightened HR challenges affecting the sector.

## NONPROFIT EMPLOYEES, HRM, AND COVID-19

The impacts of COVID-19 on nonprofit employees and HRM straddle individual, team, and organizational levels of analysis; therefore, this discussion is categorized into those same three levels of analysis. It is important to note, however, that the impacts overlap and combine to shape NHRM in the short and long term.

### Organizational-level impacts

*Layoffs and human resource pool*

COVID-19 has resulted in significant layoffs in nonprofits. According to projections by Imagine Canada (2020), nonprofits could lose more than 117,000 employees and $9.5 billion in revenue as a result of the COVID-19-related social distancing and economic downtown. Even worse, the layoff and loss projections could increase to 194,000 employees and $15.6 billion over six months. Reports in the US have similarly highlighted layoffs as one of the major impacts of the pandemic (Bell & Dell, 2020).

The layoffs are a critical drain on the HR pool and will create holes in the human capital of nonprofits. Even if nonprofits do eventually recover the lost employees, the layoffs will have a long-lasting impact on their core competencies (Lee & Wilkins, 2011). Although many nonprofits are adept at navigating occasional layoffs, due mainly to precarious funding, the scale and speed of the COVID-19-related layoffs will hamper their ability to maintain institutional knowledge and attract and retain employees (Castaneda, Garen & Thornton, 2008; Selden & Sowa, 2015). The new competencies that nonprofits are developing from the experience of COVID-19 could be lost due to the layoffs that result from the pandemic.

*Remote work*

Telecommuting, including for service delivery, has been one of the most transformational workplace shifts attributed to COVID-19. While an increasing number of nonprofit employees were working remotely prior to COVID-19 (Nonprofit HR, 2016), the pandemic has forced a record increase in remote work. Nonprofits are poised to benefit from offering a flexible work schedule and the opportunity to attract employees who value work-life balance (Christie, 2020). However, nonprofits will need to develop HR practices to address issues related to remote work, such as mental health concerns due to the isolation, the impacts on team dynamics, and the legal considerations related to interactions between clients and employees who work from home.

*Health and safety*

The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in nursing and long-term care homes, many of which are nonprofits, have elevated concerns about employee health and safety in Canada and the US (Honan, Brody, & Calfas, 2020; Weeks, Mahoney, Stone, & Ha, 2020). Nonprofit frontline employees have also raised concerns about protective equipment and psychological safety in the workplace. These point to the potential COVID-19 has to place a new focus on health and


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safety in nonprofits. Although research has highlighted concerns about nonprofit employee well-being due to employment conditions (Baluch, 2017), there is a lack of emphasis on and gap in the understanding of health and safety in nonprofits. COVID-19 has signified the need to prioritize health and safety, including emotional health, and commit resources to it.

*HR scenario planning*

The pandemic has revealed the glaring need for NHRM scenario planning in a crisis. While most nonprofits have experienced limitations with respect to service delivery and program cancellation as well as major fundraising challenges as a result of COVID-19 (Catchafire Team, 2020), the inability to continue social justice-oriented programs has highlighted a missed opportunity to deploy employees during the pandemic. For example, a talent exchange program could help nonprofits to share employees between organizations experiencing increased demand with those experiencing less demand (Christie, 2020). The HR scenario plan could address questions regarding which programs to prioritize, the competencies required to deliver the programs, the required resources, and how to support the employees during a pandemic. The plan could help nonprofits to manage the transition to online service delivery and restart in-person service delivery after the pandemic.

**Employee-level impacts**

Each of the impacts of COVID-19 on NHRM at the organizational level directly affects employees. For example, layoffs are occurring at a time when there is an increase in demand for the services of nonprofits. These have implications for workload, precarious work security, and the job satisfaction of employees after the pandemic (Cunningham & James, 2017; Howe & McDonald, 2001). In addition to the organizational-level impacts, it is important to highlight two effects of COVID-19 on employees and how they could impact NHRM.

*Employee voice*

The need to make urgent decisions in response to COVID-19 means that nonprofit leaders are not seeking inputs and engaging employees, even on decisions that affect them (Levine, 2020). Although research suggests that nonprofit employees are engaged and participate in the decision-making process (Akingbola & van den Berg, 2017), the pandemic has shown that employees feel disempowered and lack information about issues that impact them. This disengagement means that employees are reluctant to raise issues, even when they have legitimate concerns about the workplace, including safety (Villarreal, 2020). Employee voice is critical not only during COVID-19 but also in the long-term recovery of an organization's community problem-solving role. The lack of employee voice during the pandemic will impact employee relations in nonprofits long after the pandemic.

*Hazard pay*

COVID-19 has raised questions about hazards in nonprofit organizations. Although nonprofit employees provide essential services, the pay is low and they are known to have intrinsic motivation (Atkinson & Lucas, 2013; Borzaga & Tortia, 2006). Advocacy for hazard pay has resulted in governments and employers in Canada and the US providing it for some nonprofit employees delivering essential services. Thus, the impacts of COVID-19 have drawn attention to potential rationale for hazard pay in nonprofits, such as harassment, violence, and the high level of stress on the job (Baines, 2010). Questions about hazard pay will likely be one of the emergent issues in NHRM after the pandemic.

**Team-level impacts**

*Collaboration*

COVID-19 has had team-level impacts on nonprofit employees, including their ability to collaborate. Nonprofit employees typically have more opportunities to participate in decision-making through teams and work on committees (Kalleberg, Marden, Reynolds, & Knoke, 2006). With many employees working remotely due to the lockdown, COVID-19 is redefining


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the nature of collaboration among nonprofit employees. For many nonprofits and their employees, this will require new learning in order to optimize the use of technology. The lack of preparation in this regard is a challenge to collaboration among team members. Moreover, due to the interpersonal nature of the services offered by nonprofits and the characteristics of their employees, there are concerns about the impacts of limited collaboration on the emotional health of the team (Cooks, Aisen, Oberman, Levine, & Katler, 2020). NHRM must therefore pay attention to the challenges of remote work when it comes to team collaboration. This would include equipping employees with the knowledge and skills required to work in an effective team environment that is facilitated by technology.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion of the impacts of COVID-19 on nonprofit employees provides an overview of the ways the pandemic could shape NHRM. While some of the impacts, such as remote work, hazard pay, and health and safety concerns, are new issues facing NHRM in both the short and long term, the layoffs and lack of employee voice will renew focus on the impacts of these implications for nonprofit management and in research. Nonprofit leadership and funders must understand and implement strategies to address these major NHRM issues.

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# The Landscape of Social Innovation in Canadian Universities: An Empirical Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

There has been global growth in the number of social innovation initiatives launched in the university sector over the last decade. These initiatives aim to address complex social problems and to promote institutional change. This surge is occurring without a well-developed empirical knowledge base. This article provides a comprehensive description and analysis of the landscape of social innovation initiatives in the Canadian university sector. Findings show that nearly half of Canada's 96 universities are associated with at least one initiative; many are interdisciplinary and emphasize collaborative problem-solving with sectors outside the university; and government agencies and charitable foundations are the most common funding sources. Findings suggest there is room for growth and for linking and clustering initiatives. The article concludes with directions for future research.

## RÉSUMÉ

La dernière décennie a été marquée par une croissance mondiale du nombre d'initiatives d'innovation sociale lancées dans le secteur universitaire. Ces initiatives visent à résoudre des problèmes sociaux complexes et à induire des changements institutionnels et systémiques. Cette poussée de l'activité d'innovation sociale se produit sans une base de connaissances empiriques bien développée. Nous y contribuons en fournissant une description et une analyse complètes de toutes les initiatives d'innovation sociale auxquelles participe le secteur universitaire canadien, de leurs caractéristiques et du paysage qu'elles constituent. Résultats notables: près de la moitié des 96 universités canadiennes sont associées à au moins une initiative; de nombreuses initiatives sont interdisciplinaires et mettent l'accent sur la résolution de problèmes en collaboration avec des secteurs extérieurs à l'université; Les agences gouvernementales et les fondations caritatives sont les sources de financement les plus courantes. Les résultats suggèrent: il existe un potentiel de croissance de l'innovation sociale dans le secteur; il y a moins de liens internes et de regroupement d'initiatives que ne le recommande la théorie de l'innovation; l'accent mis sur la collaboration extérieure rejoint la «troisième mission» des universités, qui existe depuis longtemps, mais les innovateurs sociaux ont des objectifs, des méthodes et des processus distincts pour mener à bien cette mission. Nous concluons avec les orientations pour les recherches futures.


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**Keywords / Mots clés**: Universities; Higher education; Social innovation; Community engagement; Service mission; Social change; Canada / Universités; Établissements d'enseignement supérieur; Innovation sociale; Engagement communautaire; Mission de service; Changement social; Canada

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, a range of actors in the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors have been promoting social innovation as a way to address unmet social needs, find sustainable solutions to complex social problems, and develop a social economy (Adams & Hess, 2010; European Commission, 2016; McConnell Foundation, 2017a; Mulgan, 2006; NESTA, 2008; Quarter, Mook, & Armstrong, 2009; Westley & Antadze, 2010, 2013; White House Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation, 2016). The growing interest in social innovation has also influenced actors in the higher education sector in Canada and elsewhere, who have subsequently launched a variety of initiatives, such as centres, labs, hubs, projects, programs, and networks focused on fostering social innovation through putatively non-conventional collaborations across disciplines (internally) and sectors (externally) (Ashoka U, 2018a; Baran, Cichocka, Kroczak, & Maranowski, 2016; Benneworth & Cunha, 2015; Kanani, 2008; McConnell Foundation, 2017b; Scaled Purpose Inc., 2015; Strandberg, 2017).

By their nature, social innovation initiatives would be expected to challenge and disrupt operating norms, conventional beliefs, and practices inside universities, even as they seek to change or transform society and economy for the better. A small number of international studies (e.g., Baran et al., 2016; Elliot, 2013; Juliani, Silva, Cunha, & Benneworth, 2017) and only a few Canadian ones (e.g., Nichols, Gaetz, & Phipps, 2015; Scaled Purpose Inc., 2015) offer empirical insights on how social innovation initiatives develop in universities, what characterizes them, and what influences them. In general, the surge of social innovation activity in Canadian universities is currently taking place without a developed empirical knowledge base to support it. This study was designed to help with the development of empirical foundations for research on social innovation in the sector.

This article reports findings from research on the social innovation landscape in the Canadian university sector. Recognizing that social innovation is a dynamic, relatively new phenomenon, the study's main objective was to provide a systematic description of the current initiatives on the landscape to serve as a baseline for future research and comparisons over time in Canada and with other countries. This work was guided by an overarching question: What characterizes the landscape of social innovation initiatives in Canadian universities in 2018? It focused on three sub-questions: (1) To what extent are Canadian universities involved in social innovation initiatives? (2) What characterizes these initiatives (e.g., goals, activities, maturity)? (3) What patterns are visible on the social innovation landscape (e.g., institutional and geographic concentration, inter-relationships)?

The findings extend and deepen a few notable empirical efforts to describe components of the social innovation landscape, such as Gary Martin, Ann Dale, and Christopher Stoney's (2017) research on Canadian community-based innovation labs, and Scaled Purpose Inc.'s (2015) scan for social innovation hubs in Canadian, American, and European universities. The study also links to a growing international effort to document and analyze the growth of social innovation (e.g., Majewski Anderson, Domanski, & Howaldt, 2018; SI-DRIVE, 2014).

The next two sections provide context for the study by comparing definitions of social innovation and discussing how it is seen to address challenges in the university sector. The article then offers a description of the study methods, including how the concept of social innovation was operationalized. The findings are then presented along with a discussion regarding their implications for policy and practice. The article closes with comments on the limitations of the study and directions for future research.


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## DEFINING SOCIAL INNOVATION

Policymakers, expert practitioners, and academics have invested considerable effort in defining social innovation and its characteristics. Numerous conceptualizations have emerged, none of them definitive (Benneworth & Cunha, 2015; Lorinc, 2017; Westley, 2013). For the moment, social innovation is often presented as a broad paradigm (Stauch, 2016) that encapsulates a range of theories, definitions, and manifestations (Amanatidou, Gagliardi, & Cox, 2018; Pol & Ville 2009; TEPSIE, 2014a); however, some common threads are becoming increasingly cohesive. Social innovation is rooted in collaboration, bringing together previously unrelated actors, ideas, practices, programs, or products in new constellations to address social issues and unmet needs (Nichols, Phipps, Provencal, & Hewitt, 2013; Vorsteveld, 2016; Westley, Goebey, & Robinson, 2017), frequently with a focus on marginalized groups (European Commission, 2016). The experimental, collaborative processes at the heart of social innovation are deemed to be well-suited to creating adaptive, workable solutions to complex social problems (Bourgon, 2011). Social innovation is seen to be a process-oriented phenomenon, with prominent thinkers presenting it as a sequence of stages or phases (Mulgan, Tucker, Rushanara, & Sanders, 2007; NESTA, 2014; Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2006). Social innovation processes are also seen to enhance outcomes by providing a mechanism for the people affected by social issues to take part in co-designing solutions and co-producing outcomes (Boyle, Slay, & Stephens, 2010; Huddart, 2008; Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010; NESTA, 2008).

In Canada, the influential work of actors associated with the McConnell Foundation and the Social Innovation Generation initiative has advanced a definition that emphasizes systems change. This definition conceives social innovation as an initiative that "challenges and over time contributes to changing the defining routines, resources and authority flows, or beliefs of the broader social system in which it is introduced" (Westley, 2013, p. 2).[1] This definition uses a complexity-driven perspective that, in its reference to routines, resources, authority, and beliefs, gives prominence to institutional theory (see, for example, Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeh, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; Moore & Westley, 2011). It also incorporates sociotechnical theory in its emphasis on system transformation through cross-scale interactions (Smith, Voß, & Grin, 2010). In such interactions, innovations initiated at the periphery or in protected "niche" positions lead to changes in broader societal institutions (Geels, 2004).

In sum, by these definitions, social innovation initiatives are thought to work from niche locations in pursuit of broader or multi-level systems change, applying processes that place cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration at their core, while using previously uncommon methods.

## THE CHALLENGE FOR UNIVERSITIES

In Canada, as elsewhere, stakeholders expect universities to make demonstrable economic and social contributions at regional, national, and international levels (Marginson, 2016). This focus on forging instrumental relationships with economy and society has been intensifying in many countries for over 30 years (Pinheiro, Wangenge-Ouma, Balbachevsky, & Cai, 2015). At the outset, policymakers and university-based actors concentrated on enhancing direct economic outcomes. Technology transfer and commercialization offices, industrial parks and business incubators emerged on campuses (Bubela & Caulfield, 2010; Pinheiro et al., 2015), and specialized work-experience programs populated university curricula (Milley & Kovinthan, 2014). At the same time, some actors were also paying close attention to the social contributions of universities, in particular through the development of community-engaged teaching, research, and service initiatives (Jackson, 2008). However, the drive to increase direct social impacts from universities only came into its own in the early 2000s. This is when social innovation started to garner serious attention (McGowan & Westley, 2015; Murray et al., 2010; Nicholls & Murdock, 2012).


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In Canada, innovation is a key theme in the economic and social development strategies of governments at the federal level, as well as in some provinces. Government policy frameworks position universities as part of innovation ecosystems (Department of Finance Canada, 2016; Government of British Columbia, 2017; Government of Ontario, 2017; Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2018), and some have led to funding for university-based activities that explicitly target social innovation (Huddart, 2017). Non-governmental actors are also actively trying to position universities for greater social impact through social innovation, with the McConnell Foundation being particularly influential. Starting in 2014, the McConnell Foundation's (2017b) Re-Code initiative provided funding to projects in 37 postsecondary institutions. More recently, the McConnell Foundation (2017c) has been working with senior administrators to determine how to "leverage post-secondary 'social infrastructure' assets (financial, research, educational, relational, physical and social) in service of Canadian communities" (p. 2), with social innovation featuring prominently.

According to its proponents, social innovation also has a role to play in the internal transformation of university systems. Following this perspective, universities are seen to be under pressure to: i) adapt to changing conditions (e.g., student demographics and student mobility, fiscal pressures, global competition, technological change) (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008; Pinheiro et al., 2015); ii) reposition themselves to better support and integrate with cross-sectoral innovation systems (Benneworth & Cunha, 2015; Cai, 2017); and iii) to mitigate the negative effects of characteristics associated with mature institutions (e.g., risk-aversion, inflexibility, entrenched professional cultures) (Matheson, 2008; White & Glickman, 2007). Projects in Canada—such as hackED, an initiative of Re-Code (McConnell Foundation, 2017b)—have launched with the explicit objective of turning the lens of social innovation inward on the university to address these perceived issues.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study was designed to document the landscape of social innovation in Canadian universities at a specific point in time, recognizing the rapid pace of change in this domain. It also explored how actors themselves articulate the character, activities, and purposes of their social innovation initiatives, given the continued lack of consensus among theorists and empirical researchers on the defining characteristics of social innovation (Pol & Ville, 2009).

### Identifying cases

The cases were chosen by searching the websites of the 96 universities listed as members of Universities Canada (n.d.) to identify social innovation initiatives. To begin with, a broad set of search terms was used to avoid missing valid cases, as metadata vary by site in ways that can affect search results. The terms "social innovation," "social enterprise," "social entrepreneurship," and "social innovation lab" were used for the initial search. A Google search was conducted using the above terms combined with each institution name and the first three pages of results were reviewed. A prospect list was compiled and compared with a list of Re-Code applicants (Vorsteveld, 2016) as a third way to identify prospects.

Specific inclusion criteria were then applied to the prospects to focus the case set on social innovation. The initial prospective case list included 125 initiatives. Data was extracted from information published online about these initiatives. For a subset of 22 ambiguous cases, it was supplemented by primary data collection conducted by phone and email. The researchers discussed all cases in periodic joint sessions to refine the list via the application of inclusion criteria.

### Inclusion criteria

Initiatives were only included if they *self-identified* with social innovation through the explicit use of the term "social innovation" in their public descriptions. This term was used as an indicator of intentional positioning in this domain. Using explicit self-identification was also important to avoid the scope expanding into other cognate areas, such as community-


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campus engagement, community-based research, and community-service learning. While the latter bears similarities to social innovation in terms of a commitment to collaboration and service outside the academy, they do not overlap entirely (see concerns expressed by Majewski-Anderson et al., 2018). The study only included initiatives that clearly articulated a social mission (e.g., initiatives that used the term "social innovation" but were focused solely on the creation of for-profit ventures were excluded). In addition, only initiatives that were actively operating in the period of January to April 2018 and were engaged in ongoing activities were included (i.e., initiatives that were limited to one-time events were excluded).

Two other sets of criteria were used for inclusion: 1) a set of criteria for social innovation-related concepts drawn from the literature, and 2) "niche" criteria to indicate potential operation in areas that are novel to universities (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Inclusion criteria for cases in sample**

| Category | Description |
|---|---|
| SI "sounding board" criteria (e.g., Boyle et al., 2010; Huddart, 2008; Murray et al., 2010; Svensson et al., 2018) | The initiative is described in at least one of the following ways:<br>• Engaging in an innovation process<br>• Employing experimental, creative, adaptive processes aimed at workable solutions to complex social problems<br>• Rooted in collaboration<br>• Bringing previously unrelated actors, ideas, knowledge, practices, programs, products together to address social issues<br>• Encouraging people affected by social issues to take part in co-creation, co-design or co-production |
| "Niche" criteria (Geels, 2004; Kloet, Hessels, Zweekhorst et al., 2013) | The initiative is described with at least one of:<br>• Some level of protection from institutional constraints and pressures (e.g., an external funding mechanism, external administration)<br>• Attention to issues that are neglected by traditional academic activities, pursuing unconventional questions or activities<br>• The use of unconventional approaches, unconventional alliances |

In keeping with the potential importance of the niche or peripheral positioning of initiatives, cases were included that reported administrative independence from the university, provided that the active participation of the university was evident and explicitly documented on the university's website. In the process of qualifying cases, a number of initiatives that were sub-initiatives or projects of another case were identified in the prospect list. In these instances, only the "parent" initiative, defined as the highest-level entity that was directly engaged in social innovation activities, was retained.

A diverse array of projects and programming falls under the banner of social innovation and definitions of social innovation remain contested, a fact that informed the inclusion criteria. The overall process resulted in the exclusion of 79 prospective cases, or more than half of the original list. At the end of this process, a final list of 46 cases remained (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Cases included in sample**

| Initiative | University/Universities | Province/ Territory | Launch year |
|---|---|---|---|
| Agility Idea Shop | University of Lethbridge | AB | 2016 |
| Centre for Social Enterprise | Memorial University | NL | 2016 |
| Centre for Social Innovation and Impact Investing | University of British Columbia | BC | 2009 |


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**Table 2 (continued)**

| Initiative | University/Universities | Province/ Territory | Launch year |
|---|---|---|---|
| CityLab | McMaster University | ON | 2017 |
| CityStudio | Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia, Emily Carr University of Art + Design | BC | 2011 |
| CLARI - Change Lab Action Research Institute | Saint Mary's University, Université Sainte-Anne, Cape Breton University, St. Francis Xavier University, Mount Saint Vincent University, Acadia University | NS | 2016 |
| DESIS Lab | Emily Carr University of Art + Design | BC | 2012 |
| Discovery University | Saint Paul University, University of Ottawa, Carleton University | ON | 2005 |
| Extension Innovation and Enterprise Centre | Saint Francis Xavier University | NS | MD |
| Greenhouse | University of Waterloo | ON | 2013 |
| Impact Collective | OCAD University | ON | 2014 |
| Innovate Calgary Social Enterprise Incubator Program | University of Calgary | AB | 2018 |
| Island Sandbox | Cape Breton University | NS | 2014 |
| Jane-Finch Community Impact Hub | York University | ON | 2016 |
| L'Espace Lab | Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue | QC | 2018 |
| Libro Social Innovation Program | University of Windsor | ON | 2018 |
| MacEwan Social Innovation Hub (Roundhouse) | MacEwan University | AB | 2018 |
| Maison de l'innovation sociale (MIS) | HEC Montreal, Concordia University | QC | 2017 |
| Making the Shift Youth Homelessness SI Lab | York University | ON | 2017 |
| MaRS Solutions Lab | University of Waterloo | ON | 2013 |
| Mauril-Bélanger Social Innovation Workshop | Saint Paul University | ON | 2018 |
| METIS (Entre Genie et Medecine) | Ecole Polytechnique Montréal | QC | 2010 |
| Northern Innovation Hub | University of Ottawa | ON | 2014 |
| NouLab | University of New Brunswick | NB | 2015 |
| Office of Social Innovation | Ryerson University | ON | 2016 |
| Quartier de l'innovation (QI) | École de technologie supérieure, McGill University, Concordia University, Université du Québec à Montréal | QC | 2013 |
| RADIUS (RADical Ideas Useful to Society) | Simon Fraser University | BC | 2013 |


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**Table 2 (continued)**

| Initiative | University/Universities | Province/ Territory | Launch year |
|---|---|---|---|
| Schlegel Centre for Entrepreneurship and SI | Wilfrid Laurier University | ON | 2017 |
| SIx | Carleton University | ON | 2017 |
| Skills Society Citizen Action Lab | University of Alberta | AB | 2016 |
| Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, Northern Region Partnership | Algoma University | ON | 2014 |
| Social Innovators' Integration Lab | McGill University, Carleton University | QC, ON | 2016 |
| Social Learning for Social Impact GROOC | McGill University | QC | 2015 |
| Social Ventures Zone | Ryerson University | ON | 2014 |
| SparkZone | Saint Mary's University, Mount Saint Vincent University, NSCAD University | NS | 2014 |
| Strategic Innovation Lab | OCAD University | ON | 2008 |
| Sustain X | University of Alberta | AB | 2016 |
| The Guelph Lab | University of Guelph | ON | 2015 |
| Trico Changemakers Studio | Mount Royal University | AB | 2018 |
| Tswassen Farm School | Kwantlen Polytechnic University | BC | 2015 |
| Ulab Social Innovation Hub | Concordia University | QC | 2016 |
| Vancouver Island Social Innovation Zone | Royal Roads University, University of Victoria | BC | 2016 |
| Vivacity | Mount Royal University, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge | AB | 2013 |
| Winnipeg Boldness | University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg | MB | 2014 |
| Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience | University of Waterloo | ON | 2010 |
| SHIFT | Concordia University, Université du Québec à Montréal | ON | 2018 |

## Characteristics of the data

For each case, data was extracted to structured case sheets using a preset Microsoft Word template. These data included qualitative text extracts (e.g., a mission statement); categorical data (e.g., the types of funding reported, the types of activities, disciplinary affiliation); and other attributes (e.g., launch year). Selected web pages were also collected for each initiative (e.g., pages stating the initiative's mission and purpose, pages describing activities and projects, and pages listing contact information and the people involved). A total of 375 pages were compiled.


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### Analysis

Categorical and quantitative case data was organized in a Microsoft Excel matrix for descriptive statistical analysis. Qualitative data was coded and analyzed in NVivo. Two team members coded the qualitative data independently following a preset framework and met at intervals to compare results. Differences in coding results were discussed with reference to coding definitions. A subset of cases that presented challenges to consensus was revisited at the end of the process and compared against "archetype" cases to ensure coding accuracy. All results were reviewed and discussed as a team at key points during analysis, at times prompting a return to the raw data to resolve ambiguities, until consensus was reached.

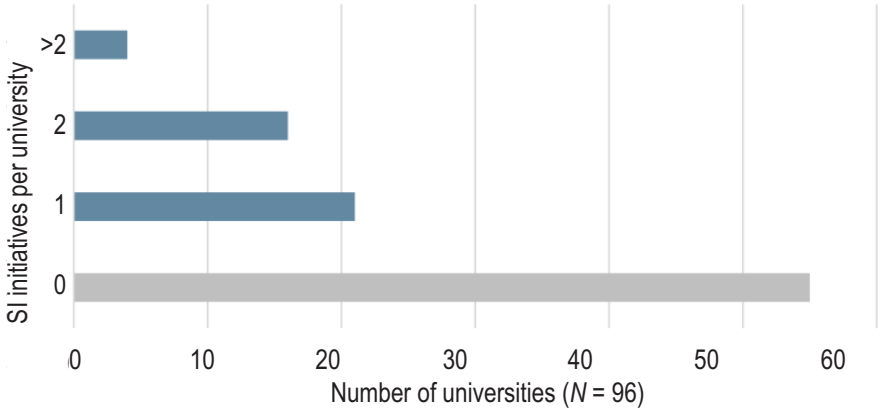
## FINDINGS

The findings are organized by the three sub-questions guiding the study.

### Research question 1: To what extent are Canadian universities involved in social innovation initiatives?

Forty-one of Canada's 96 universities were found to be involved in at least one social innovation initiative, as defined by the study's criteria. This represents close to half (43%) of the universities. Of those 41, most (21) were involved with a single initiative, and some (16) were involved with two. Only a few (4) were engaged with more than two initiatives (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: SI initiatives per university**




Overall, there was less penetration of social innovation within institutions and less spread across the sector than might be expected, given the internationally recognized level of social innovation activity in Canada more generally (Kondo, 2016). There appears to remain substantial room for growth.[2]

### Research question 2: What characterizes social innovation in Canadian universities?

The initiatives in the study's set of cases were striking for their youth and interdisciplinary character. They also reported a diverse set of activities and focus areas.

*Youth*

The majority (84%) of the initiatives had launched within the previous five years (see Figure 2). More than a quarter of the initiatives in the case list (27%) had launched within the previous 16 months. Likely explanations for this pattern include attrition, recent targeted funding and policy orientations, and the reorientation of older initiatives. In terms of attrition, there is some evidence in the initial search data of initiatives failing after five years. In addition, the initial prospect list identified several older initiatives that had ceased activities and were, therefore, excluded from the case set. The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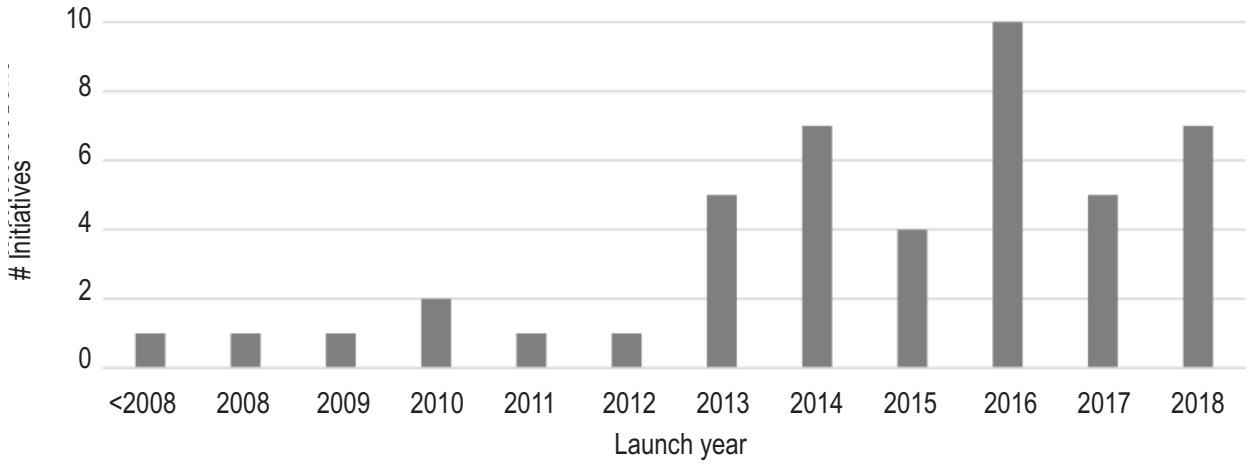
most high profile among these was the Social Innovation Generation project associated with the University of Waterloo (Cahill & Spitz, 2017). Another likely contributor is the intensified interest and availability of funding in Canada in the five years leading up to data collection, the most notable being the McConnell Foundation's Re-Code project (2017b). Lastly, there may be some "rebranding" or "morphing" of older initiatives to encompass social innovation. An example is the re-orientation of the Schlegel Centre at Wilfrid Laurier University, which was relaunched to include "for entrepreneurship and social innovation" in its name in 2016.[3]

**Figure 2: Number of initiatives by year launched**




*Interdisciplinarity and disciplinary (non)affiliation*

There was no evidence of the concentration of social innovation activity in any particular discipline. Most of the initiatives (65%) either did not report a specific faculty or disciplinary affiliation, or described themselves as interdisciplinary. For example, the Centre for Social Enterprise at Memorial University (2018) is a collaboration between the School of Music, the School of Social Work, and the Faculty of Business Administration. Of those explicitly connected to a single discipline or faculty, eight were located in schools of business or management, four in faculties of arts and science, and four in another faculty (e.g., engineering, environment). A noteworthy minority of cases (20%) is administered by an organization or entity outside of the university. Examples include CityLab, CityStudio, and Winnipeg Boldness. One case, the Guelph Lab (University of Guelph, n.d.), is jointly administered by the university and the local municipality. The case data indicate diversity with respect to where the initiatives originated. Some were initiated by individual groups of actors at the "grass-roots" level. Others were sponsored by central administration, i.e., as part of an institutional-level strategy.

In sum, there appears to be significant diversity with respect to the location of initiatives within higher education institutions. These findings are consistent with observations by others (e.g., Kanani, 2016) that interest in social innovation has spread across multiple disciplines from an early concentration in business schools. It is also consistent with the assertion that social innovation initiatives draw on and promote interdisciplinarity (TEPSIE, 2014b). The issue of location relative to the university's central administration is revisited below in the discussion regarding questions for future research.

*Activities*

The activities and services offered through the initiatives were recorded. Through an iterative coding process, 13 types of common activities were found across multiple cases. Nearly all cases (93%) reported carrying out more than one type of activity, with an average of five per initiative. These 13 types were grouped under four thematic categories: fostering collaboration or engagement; training, mentoring, and capacity building; new venture support; and academic research.[4]


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Table 3 lists the activities identified and the number of initiatives that reported engaging in each one.[5] Overall, there was a heavy emphasis on fostering collaboration and/or engagement outside the university. Nearly all cases (91%) reported activities in this category. In particular, 65 percent of the cases described linking and brokering activities, for example, developing networks to connect people, resources, and ideas. About half (52%) reported providing a physical space for direct collaboration, usually described as a lab space.

**Table 3: Types of activities and number of initiatives engaging in each type**

| Activity Category/Type | # of Initiatives |
|---|---|
| Fostering Collaboration or Engagement | 42 |
| Linking and brokering (e.g., network development; connecting people, resources, and ideas) | 30 |
| Space for collaboration (e.g., providing a dedicated lab space, a "collision space") | 24 |
| "Real-life" project collaboration (e.g., design thinking, co-production, prototyping solutions, implementing projects) | 21 |
| Applied/community-engaged research collaborations | 16 |
| Hosting events (e.g., issue-based forums and exchanges) | 13 |
| Training, Mentoring, Capacity Building | 37 |
| Programming to build capacity for social innovation/social enterprise (e.g., workshops, coaching for a variety of actors, including outside the university) | 24 |
| Academic programming (e.g., courses, certificates, experiential learning for enrolled students) | 22 |
| Mentoring and advisory services (e.g., one-on-one advice and support) | 18 |
| New Venture Support | 23 |
| Incubation/acceleration of new ventures | 18 |
| Competitions | 10 |
| Seed funding | 10 |
| Academic Research About SI | 9 |
| Academic research and/or evaluation studies on SI and/or SE (e.g., SI theory-building, "what works" studies) | 8 |
| Knowledge mobilization, the dissemination of research about SI and/or SE | 4 |

The second most common overall category was training, mentoring, and capacity building. A strong majority of initiatives (80%) reported activities in this category, particularly programming to build capacity for actors to engage in social innovation work (e.g., offering workshops or coaching to non-university-based individuals or groups).

The third most common category was support to new social ventures (e.g., social enterprise incubation). Half of the cases described activities to accelerate the creation or launch of new ventures. This is not so surprising, since in spite of their different roots, cross-pollination between social innovation, social enterprise, and social entrepreneurship is well documented (Cunha, Benneworth, & Oliveira, 2015; Szijarto, Milley, Svensson, & Cousins, 2018). In recognition of this, the case data was searched for the explicit use of the terms "social enterprise" and "social entrepreneurship" to determine how many of the cases used them. As noted above, all of the cases in the set used the term "social innovation." In


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addition, 33 percent referred to social entrepreneurship, 28 percent to social enterprise, and 15 percent used both terms. Scholars recognize these two terms tend to be nested within the social innovation lexicon or used interchangeably with the term social innovation; yet they are also distinct concepts (Cunha et al. 2015; Szijarto et al., 2018). Social enterprise describes a specific organizational structure or is sometimes used to refer to a hybridized set of organizational features, such as the use of business methods and joint economic and social aims (see, for example, Antadze & Westley, 2012; Cunha et al., 2015). Social enterprises depart from other social innovation initiatives in ways linked with identity, as well as structure and methods (Szijarto et al., 2018). Social entrepreneurship is also a concept with its own features, connected to its agent or actor-driven focus and its own "distinct intellectual heritage" relative to social innovation (Cunha et al., 2015 p. 2). Yet, the three concepts nonetheless have a social mission in common, and this study's empirical data reflect their intermixing in the field of practice, despite scholarly debate at the conceptual level.

*Focus areas*

Fewer than half of the cases (43%) identified a particular substantive focus or topic area for the initiative, such as a specific population (e.g., individuals who are homeless) or problem area (e.g., the environment). The remaining initiatives (57%) tended to describe activities aimed broadly at systemic or social change but did not reference predetermined areas of focus. Some members of this second group described an intention to allow foci to remain open until determined through a process (e.g., dialogue with community stakeholders).

Among the cases that reported a substantive focus, half identified a single focal issue (e.g., climate change). The other half reported two or more issues of interest. The diversity of issues identified in these data is striking; 14 were identified among these 20 cases. The most common related to environmental issues. Half of the initiatives (10) reported some focus of this nature (e.g., environmental sustainability, clean technology, climate change resilience). The next most reported topics were local development (e.g., healthy neighbourhoods, local culture and heritage, municipal excellence) and poverty/inequality. Other topics included alternative economics, health/mental health, youth, new Canadians, Indigenous Peoples, persons who are homeless, food security, violence prevention, persons with disabilities, and education outside universities. All these foci pertain to issues outside of the university, and the emphasis is mostly local or regional.

Among initiatives that did not target specific social issues, several expressed openness to diverse foci, with open-ended collaboration and/or open-space engagement with stakeholders serving as a means to identify and define issues for attention. The presence of both issue-directed and co-creative approaches corresponds with the ways in which social innovation is being pursued in other sectors and internationally, where it develops both from problem-recognition and through discovery and incubation processes in hubs, labs, and other open-space environments (TEPSIE, 2014b). The diversity afforded by a landscape for social innovation that accommodates multiple origins, foci, and activities (along with interdisciplinarity) is understood to be a strength (Cameron, 2012; Mulgan, 2012; TEPSIE, 2014b).

Overall, however, there was a minimal emphasis on innovation, disruption, or change *inside* universities. This is surprising because the literature has identified conventional institutional structures and norms as impediments to social change through social innovation (Cameron, 2012; Moore & Westley, 2011). This is revisited in the discussion below.

**Research question 3: What characterizes the overall social innovation landscape?**

The third research question focused on relationships in the landscape. This study reports on three types of relationships: those with other universities, those with other non-university organizations, and funding relationships.

*Relationships with universities*

Only about one quarter of the initiatives (24%) reported formal relationships with more than one university. Those that in-


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volved multiple universities were almost all geographically defined, with collaborations between institutions located in the same urban area or region. Such collaborations involved between two and six universities (three on average).

Some observers call for the clustering and linking of innovations and innovators to advance social innovation (e.g., Mulgan, 2006, 2012). Although, the data does not strongly evidence this dynamic in terms of formal relationships, research revealed informal networks emerging in the sector, such as Converge: Canadian Lab Practitioners Exchange (RADIUS, 2018), a Canadian Network Day at Ashoka Changemaker Showcase events (Ashoka U, 2018b), and the recent emergence of Social Innovation Canada (2019) as a national networking organization. Paul Benneworth and Jorge Cunha (2015) argue that a tension exists between the competitive operational environment in universities and the collaborative nature of social innovation. This may be one factor influencing patterns of formal collaboration. This notion is revisited below in the discussion about an agenda for research.

*Non-university relationships*

Although only 24 percent of initiatives reported collaborating with multiple universities, most (83%) reported a relationship with at least one other external organization, such as a government agency, foundation, not-for-profit agency, or private sector company. The most commonly reported non-university relationship was with government (57% of cases), followed closely by foundations (52%) and not-for-profit agencies (52%). Fewer than half of the initiatives (41%) reported formal relationships with the private sector.

The number and diversity of reported relationships vary widely. A few initiatives reported none, while others reported extensive and diverse ties with, for example, small local businesses as well as national agencies, and across multiple sectors. Linkages were reported both at the organizational level (e.g., funding relationships as described below) and via individual actors (e.g., advisory board members for Winnipeg Boldness, who connect with 16 other organizations).

More than a quarter (28%) of the initiatives in the set named the McConnell Foundation, making it by far the single most identified organization-level relationship. One third (33%) of the cases reported a connection with a bank or a credit union. Other organizations identified by multiple cases are Ashoka Changemakers (three initiatives), Enactus (three), MaRS (three), Social Innovation Generation (three), and chapters of the United Way (three). No single government agency at any level stood out across the cases; however, eleven initiatives (24%) reported a relationship with their local municipal government. Overall, relationships were strongly local or regional, consistent with the foci of many initiatives on local or regional issues (as noted above). This pattern also accords with how universities have been viewed and treated as engines of local and regional economic development (Bramwell & Wolfe, 2008; Doutriaux, 1998). In general, these data suggest a fragmented landscape, with the McConnell Foundation currently the key "outside" actor on the landscape by a wide margin.

*Funding relationships*

Most initiatives (67%) publicly recognized at least one source of funding (see Figure 3), and of these, a majority (58%) reported multiple types (e.g., both foundation and private sector funding). The most commonly reported funding source was a foundation (53% of the initiatives). Private sector funding sources followed: 48% of the initiatives that reported funding relationships included at least one from the private sector. The data revealed less private sector involvement than was anticipated in light of the focus on social enterprise and entrepreneurship as key areas of activity in nearly half of these initiatives.

Municipalities were the least commonly reported government funders, and equal to funding from individual private citizens. Nevertheless, there is broad taxpayer investment in university-linked social innovation initiatives. When levels of govern-


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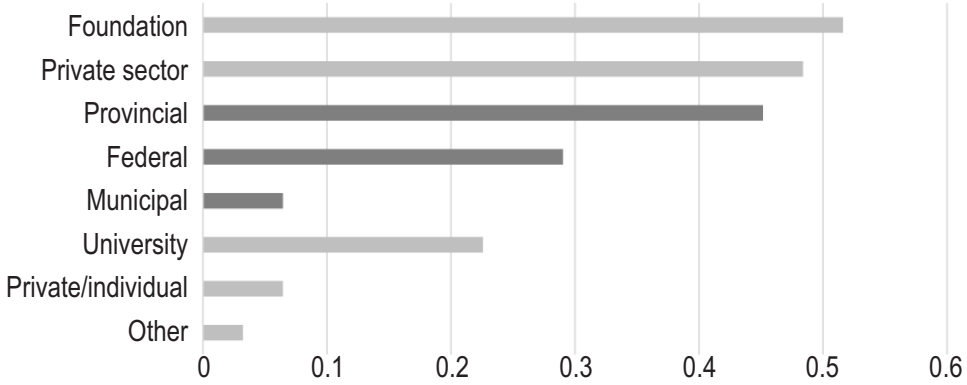
ment are combined (federal, provincial, and municipal), this becomes the most common funding source: 81 percent of cases identified a government funder at some level.

**Figure 3: Funding sources by percentage of initiatives reporting**




More initiatives reported support from a provincial government than the federal government. This is not surprising, as education falls under provincial authority in Canada. Fewer identified ties with the federal government might also relate to the absence of a federal social innovation strategy at the time of data collection (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018a). Such a strategy has been under development, and the advisory council for it includes actors associated with university-based social innovation initiatives (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018b). Additional involvement of the federal government in university-based social innovation seems plausible in the near future.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS ON FUTURE RESEARCH

These findings highlight the diversity among social innovation initiatives in Canadian universities, particularly with respect to their interdisciplinarity, the types of activities they undertake, their areas of focus, and their partnerships. Yet the cases also exhibit common features. They tend to be young, regionally or locally oriented, and mainly focused outward to address social issues beyond the university.

Numerous activities were identified at the heart of the work of these initiatives. Activities spanned the types of support proposed by Benneworth and Cunha (2015) with which universities might contribute to social innovation, namely providing and brokering knowledge and contributing material resources (such as physical space) and know-how (such as mentorship and advice on innovation processes).

The majority of initiatives aim to foster collaboration or engagement between actors inside and outside of the university to address social issues. This intersects with the long-standing "third mission"—the duty to service—of modern universities (Jongbloed et al., 2008) and with what some actors in university communities have been doing for many years through, for example, joint training or research projects that bring together the academic community with actors from other sectors via community service learning (Hall, 2009), community campus engagement (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010), or community-based research (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008). Yet, based on their self-descriptions, the social innovation initiatives in this data set differentiate themselves from these longer-standing approaches. Specifically, they offer alternative conceptual and methodological frameworks, and unconventional practice-level structures and processes (Boyle et al., 2010; Murray et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2013; Westley et al., 2017). For example, organizational forms such as hubs and labs, conceptual inputs such as innovation process theory, and methods such as design thinking feature prominently in the data. The difference between social innovation and other community-campus engagement initiatives seems most visible in how the former describe how they carry out their activities, particularly with respect to experimentation and iteration, the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intensity of collaboration, direct intervention in problems using a systems-thinking mindset, and the use of ideas and models from the business community, such as social entrepreneurship and enterprise.

Most of the initiatives included in this study are also engaged in training, mentoring, and capacity building activities. This category has an educational focus and, thus, builds on the core functions and competences of university communities. In addition, half of the initiatives support the launch of social enterprises, which fits with role of universities as key players in innovation ecosystems (Jongbloed et al., 2008) and builds on the role universities have played in supporting other forms of entrepreneurship and venture creation through schools of business, university extension activities, and, more recently, technology transfer and commercialization offices. As above, what differentiates social innovation from these latter activities is how social innovation initiatives describe how they carry out their work and their focus on social change and impact.

An empirically based typology for social innovation proposed by Maria Rabadijeva, Antonius Schröder, and Marthe Zirngiebl (2017) is relevant to these findings. This typology includes four types: repairing, modernizing, transforming, and separating. Repairing and modernizing types focus primarily on improving, fixing, or extending existing offerings (e.g., adding the remote delivery of services via a new technology) but leave the "system's core identity untouched" (p. 87). The transforming type seeks more fundamental system-level change. Members of the separating type operate in parallel, at times in competition with incumbents and may ultimately replace them. In a similar way, Yuzhuo Cai (2017) draws on the work of Clayton Christensen and Henry Eyring (2011) to describe two types of innovations in universities: "disrupting" or "sustaining" (p. 597). The former threatens university traditions, while the latter does not. In this case data, most reported activities are consistent with the core functions of the university, some extend them but few appear to depart fundamentally. They were overwhelmingly oriented to change outside the institution.

**The importance of conceptual clarity**

Because many definitions of social innovation exist, it might be expected that social innovation in universities would articulate the character, activities, and purpose of their initiatives in a variety of ways. In the sample within this study, some initiatives offered clear and nuanced characterizations of their work, while others provided limited information or information that was ambiguously worded.

Ambiguity is a concern if it indicates underdeveloped thinking about what the initiative does and why, and its role relative to other university programming. This has implications for an initiative's development and sustainability. Ambiguity also presents obstacles for outside actors to understand the initiative, including funders, policymakers, and potential participants.[6] Previous research (i.e., Svensson, Szijarto, Milley, & Cousins, 2018) shows that there is confusion in other sectors about what constitutes social innovations versus conventional projects or programs. A lack of clarity may even lead skeptics to perceive social innovation initiatives as a mere rebranding of established areas of practice to enhance the image of the program or institution.

Intermediary organizations active in social innovation in the university sector (e.g., Ashoka U, Enactus, McConnell Foundation) are providing an interpretive function for outsiders who are trying to make sense of this field. These intermediaries are likely to help shape what social innovation is understood to be and what it becomes, alongside policy and funding bodies. There is a role here for social innovation practitioners to ensure that their voices are clearly heard. There is also a role for researchers to track developments and return what they learn to practitioners, policymakers, and funders. The next section addresses an agenda for research, after noting some limitations of the present study.

**Limitations**

This study was intended to provide an exploratory, descriptive scan of the terrain during a defined time period. The study's


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scope and design carry limitations. In particular, it relied largely on publicly available information, self-published by the initiatives and their associated universities. Consequently, the results reflect how the initiatives describe themselves and their work to a public audience.

Moreover, while the inclusion criteria were intended to maintain a clear focus on the phenomenon of interest, the resulting case set may understate the influence of social innovation in the university sector. More may be going on informally or may be falling under different terms than the ones used here.

Part of the challenge for a study of this type is the rapid change in this field. During the search process, the initiatives went through numerous changes: rebranding and reorganizing; initiatives being launched and retired; new staff, strategies, activities, and partnerships; changing web content; and shifts in approaches to participation in the social innovation domain from major actors (e.g., the termination of a major funding program). This added to the challenges of case qualification and the subsequent analysis of the set.

**Agenda for research**

This study raised numerous questions about the future of social innovation in higher education. Four areas of inquiry seem especially deserving of attention.

First, there was very little mention in the data about explicit objectives for fundamental change within the university system or institutional renewal. In-depth case study work is needed to better understand the range and variety of objectives and the degree to which outward-facing initiatives may (or may not) influence internal innovation. For example, it has been proposed that engagement with social innovation might fundamentally change the nature of teaching in universities (Benneworth & Cunha, 2015). A study to trace such processes is becoming viable with the extent of the uptake and duration of engagement in social innovation by universities.

Second, given that collaboration is at the heart of social innovation, what it looks like and how it functions in practice is an important question. At a landscape level, very few formal linkages were found between initiatives and there was little cross-institutional clustering. There is likely to be more interaction than indicated in the data. Social network analysis may be a worthwhile means to better understand the formal and informal patterns of collaboration and what may influence them. This type of study would offer a baseline for comparison over time.

Third, the empirical evidence base for claims made about the contributions and impacts of social innovation, whether outside or inside universities, remains limited (TEPSIE, 2014a). Critical questions have been raised in this respect, for example, on community innovation labs (Martin, Dale & Stoney, 2017). Fortunately, there is a growing knowledge base on how to assess and evaluate social innovations, given their unique purposes, features, and processes (see e.g., Antadze & Westley, 2012; Fischer & Richter, 2017; Milley, Szijarto, Svensson, & Cousins, 2018; Patton 2011; Preskill & Beer, 2010; Svensson, Szijarto, Milley, & Cousins, 2018; Vo & Christie, 2018). Those asking evaluative questions (and those subject to such questions) should be encouraged to explore, learn from, and advance that body of work, so that approaches taken to evaluation can be "fit for purpose."

Finally, there are now many practitioners with experience operationalizing ideas associated with social innovation in universities. Empirical description drawing on their experiences could help bring clarity about how social innovation is practiced. Such research could investigate how these actors translate the "ideal" of social innovation into practice, and the ways in which practice can advance social innovation theory.


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Social innovation is still a young field of practice and research. Ultimately, whether and how it will influence universities and their host communities and societies remains an open question.

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## NOTES

- In the U.K. and Europe, the early work of Geoff Mulgan (2006) and various actors associated with The Young Foundation (2012), NESTA (2008), Social Innovation Exchange (2018), and the European Commission (2016) has had a significant influence. This work draws from innovation strategy and process, social economy and movements, and social enterprise perspectives. This results in definitions that emphasize the invention of new products, processes, models, and organizational entities, while emphasizing collaboration and interaction to produce social capital.
- Seventeen cases in other universities that reflected an interest in social innovation were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria.
- These influencing factors are likely to be interrelated. For example, the degree to which funders and policymakers emphasize new initiatives or projects may incentivize new launches or rebranding. The extent to which they emphasize specific and tangible "quick returns" from social innovation over capacity building for social innovation is also likely to affect the sustainability of the initiatives (Benneworth & Cunha, 2015). As an example, see the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council's (2019) College and Community Innovation program.
- Some activities, such as research about social innovation, would not by themselves have qualified the case for this study; however, to provide a more complete picture of the full range of activities, initiatives where research activities co-existed with other activities were included.
- This data is based on self-reporting via the initiatives' online content. For this reason, the findings about activities are most useful for understanding a relative emphasis in types of activities across cases.
- Jessica Vorsteveld (2016) noted similarly unclear language in a study of strategies for social innovation and social enterprise programming at Canadian universities.

## WEBSITES

Ashoka Changemakers, https://www.ashoka.org/en-ca/program/ashoka-changemakers
Centre for Social Enterprise at Memorial University, https://www.mun.ca/socialenterprise
CityLab, https://www.citylab.com
CityStudio, https://citystudiovancouver.com
Enactus, https://enactus.org
MaRS, https://www.marsdd.com
McConnell Foundation, https://mcconnellfoundation.ca
Social Innovation Generation, http://www.sigeneration.ca
United Way, http://unitedway.ca
Winnipeg Boldness Project, https://www.winnipegboldness.ca


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# Innovation sociale et travail institutionnel : le rôle des organismes communautaires dans l'évolution des politiques sociales au Québec

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## ABSTRACT

In Quebec, the participation of community organizations in the development of social policies at the provincial level since the 1970s is a well-known and well documented empirical reality. Using the notion of institutional work as developed by sociological institutionalism, we demonstrate how actors from the third sector have been able to play an active role in the institutionalization of some of their practices, thus accomplishing work towards the creation of institutions. Basing ourselves on three case studies on innovative practices in the health and social services (the Carpe Diem approach, the autonomous management of medication, and community support for social housing), we highlight two forms of institutional work exercised by these actors: the constitution of normative networks, which favors the change of policy norms in a given field, and the construction of identities, which conditions collective action.

## RÉSUMÉ

Au Québec, la participation des organismes communautaires à l'élaboration et à la mise en œuvre des politiques sociales au niveau provincial depuis les années 1970 est une réalité empirique connue et bien documentée. En nous appuyant sur la notion de travail institutionnel, telle que développé par l'institutionnalisme sociologique, nous démontrons comment ces acteurs du tiers secteur ont pu jouer un rôle actif dans l'institutionnalisation de certaines de leurs pratiques et opérer ainsi un travail de création institutionnelle. À partir de trois études de cas dans le domaine de la santé et des services sociaux portant sur des pratiques innovantes (approche Carpe Diem, gestion autonome de la médication et soutien communautaire en logement social), nous faisons ressortir plus particulièrement deux formes de travail institutionnel exercé par ces acteurs : la constitution de réseaux normatifs, qui favorise le changement des normes d'intervention dans un secteur donné, et la construction d'identités, qui conditionne l'action collective.

**Keywords** / **Mots clés** Social innovation; Institutionalization; Community organizations; Third sector; Québec / Innovation sociale; Institutionnalisation; Organismes communautaires; Tiers secteur; Québec


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Au Québec, la participation des organismes communautaires à l'élaboration et à la mise en œuvre des politiques sociales au niveau provincial depuis les années 1970 est une réalité empirique connue et bien documentée. Cette dynamique a été observée dans des secteurs variés, incluant entre autres la santé et les services sociaux (Jetté, 2008), l'insertion en emploi (Shields, 2010) et le logement social (Vaillancourt *et al.*, 2017). L'adoption de certaines politiques intersectorielles concernant la reconnaissance de l'action communautaire (White, 2012) ou encore de l'économie sociale (Arsenault, 2018) témoigne également de ce phénomène. Si certains auteurs ont interprété comme une forme de néocorporatisme cette ouverture de l'État face aux groupes de la société civile—visible dans d'autres domaines que les politiques sociales (Montpetit, 2003)—d'autres en ont plutôt fait l'une des caractéristiques du modèle québécois de développement (Rigaud *et al.*, 2010). Pour expliquer cette réalité, certains auteurs parlent aussi d'un régime de citoyenneté québécois distinct du reste du Canada, notamment au regard des modes d'accès à l'État et de la représentation des intérêts collectifs (Jenson, 1998).

Cette participation des organismes communautaires au développement des politiques sociales a pris une multitude de formes à travers le temps et selon les secteurs : partenariats, tables de concertation, comités consultatifs, invitations à des sommets, notamment les deux sommets socioéconomiques de 1996 auxquels les groupes communautaires ont été conviés pour la première fois aux côtés des syndicats et du patronat. Pour distinguer les choses, Vaillancourt (2014) utilise les notions de co-production (lorsque les organisations du tiers secteur collaborent à la mise en œuvre des politiques) et de co-construction (lorsque celles-ci contribuent à leur élaboration).

À certaines occasions, les organismes communautaires ont aussi été à l'origine d'innovations sociales importantes qui ont été intégrées aux politiques sociales (pensons notamment aux centres locaux de services communautaires (CLSC) qui sont issus du modèle des cliniques communautaires de santé). Ce phénomène peut relever d'une vision « minimaliste » de l'innovation sociale lorsque les pratiques ou les approches développées viennent suppléer aux insuffisances de l'État et du marché ou d'une vision « maximaliste » de l'innovation lorsqu'elles ont pour ambition de susciter de nouveaux arrangements institutionnels et de favoriser l'émancipation des personnes marginalisées (Unger, 2015, pp. 235–237). Dans tous les cas, l'institutionnalisation s'avère une dynamique centrale pour saisir la portée immédiate et prospective de ces innovations.

Il est possible d'identifier au moins deux tendances dans la façon dont l'institutionnalisation est traitée dans la littérature sur les organismes communautaires. Une première tendance, d'inspiration wébérienne, consiste à aborder l'institutionnalisation « par le haut », comme un processus linéaire par lequel l'État vient encadrer et contrôler les groupes communautaires, principalement au moyen du financement (Duval *et al.*, 2004; Lamoureux, 2010; Depelteau, Fortier et Hébert, 2013). Une deuxième tendance appréhende plutôt l'institutionnalisation comme un processus dynamique et non-linéaire, dans lequel l'État et les groupes communautaires sont continuellement en interaction et se façonnent de part et d'autre (Jetté, 2008; White, 2012; Masson, 2015). Dans cette seconde perspective, les organismes communautaires sont dotés d'une capacité d'action ou agentivité qui leur permet d'initier leurs propres pratiques, de développer des rapports de force et de négocier les arrangements institutionnels les concernant.

S'inscrivant dans cette seconde voie, le présent article vise à mieux comprendre comment les organismes communautaires peuvent participer à l'institutionnalisation de leurs pratiques ou de leurs approches. En reprenant la notion de travail institutionnel (Lawrence et Suddaby, 2006) issue de la théorie néo-institutionnelle, nous avançons l'argument que ces acteurs jouent un rôle actif dans ce processus. Ils opèrent du même coup un travail de création institutionnelle qui contribue à faire évoluer les normes dans les secteurs où ils interviennent.

Nous démontrerons cet argument à l'aide de trois études de cas dans le domaine de la santé et des services sociaux sur des pratiques communautaires institutionnalisées de manière partielle ou complète : l'approche Carpe Diem pour


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les personnes atteintes de la maladie d'Alzheimer, la gestion autonome de la médication (GAM) pour les personnes aux prises avec des problèmes de santé mentale, et le soutien communautaire en logement social, une pratique visant à assurer la stabilité résidentielle de différentes populations vulnérables (personnes à risque d'itinérance, en perte d'autonomie, etc.). Développées à la fin des années 1980 et au début des années 1990, ces pratiques continuent d'être employées en 2020. Deux formes de travail institutionnel en particulier retiendront notre attention : la constitution de réseaux normatifs et la construction d'identités.

L'article est divisé en quatre parties. Les deux premières nous permettront de situer un certain nombre de repères historiques et théoriques sur la transformation de l'État-providence, la notion d'innovation sociale et celle de travail institutionnel. La troisième partie nous servira à présenter notre méthodologie et à décrire sommairement les trois pratiques à l'étude. Enfin, la quatrième partie sera consacrée à l'analyse des formes de travail institutionnel exercées par les organismes communautaires. Les contributions de notre étude seront discutées en conclusion.

## TRANSFORMATION DE L'ÉTAT-PROVIDENCE ET INNOVATION SOCIALE

Au Québec, il a fallu attendre les années 1960 pour que le gouvernement provincial se dote, à l'instar du gouvernement fédéral canadien, d'institutions relevant d'un véritable État-providence. Dans le domaine de la santé et des services sociaux, la réforme Castonguay-Nepveu en 1971 se voulait le coup d'envoi d'une étatisation de plusieurs types d'établissement (hôpitaux, agences de services sociaux, centres d'accueil, orphelinats, etc.), jusque-là administrés par le clergé et l'Église catholique. Cette réforme a fait entrer les services socio-sanitaires de plain-pied dans un modèle de développement qualifié de « fordiste et providentialiste » (Bélanger et Lévesque, 1990). Ce modèle s'est caractérisé notamment par la mise en place de politiques sociales plus généreuses, une syndicalisation accrue, une centralisation des négociations dans le secteur public et une plus grande accessibilité, universalité et gratuité des services. Ces avancées sur les plans social et économique ont eu leurs revers sur le plan démocratique. L'École de régulation, notamment, a montré comment ces progrès avaient eu pour contrepartie une dépossession du droit de regard—d'une part des travailleurs des secteurs public et marchand sur la gestion et l'organisation du travail (tayloriste) et d'autre part des citoyens sur l'élaboration des politiques ainsi que sur l'organisation et la prestation des services publics (Bélanger et Lévesque, 1991).

C'est à partir de ce constat de double exclusion démocratique qu'ont émergé les revendications des premiers groupes populaires québécois au cours des années 1960 et 1970. Ces groupes se donnaient pour mission de répondre aux besoins des communautés à partir de pratiques citoyennes ancrées dans leurs milieux. S'appuyant sur la participation des publics concernés, œuvrant le plus souvent à l'échelle locale, et misant sur une hybridation des ressources et des principes d'action (principalement la redistribution et la réciprocité), ces groupes ont été désignés comme « organismes communautaires » à partir des années 1980. Ceux-ci ont construit leurs pratiques en réaction aux défaillances des grandes bureaucraties et de leurs dispositifs technocratiques (CSMQ, 1985). De manière générale, ils ont cherché à dépasser les contraintes liées au providentialisme en se positionnant en complémentarité (tout en conservant leur autonomie) plutôt qu'en substitution au secteur public.

Leurs pratiques alternatives ont trouvé un contexte particulièrement favorable à leur développement au tournant des années 1980, au moment où entraient en crise les principales institutions de l'État-providence. Cette crise, qui a pavé la voie à « un nouvel esprit du capitalisme » (Boltanski et Chiapello, 1999), a amené certains chercheurs à se pencher de manière plus attentive sur les pratiques des organisations du tiers secteur (organismes communautaires et organismes de l'économie sociale et solidaire) qu'ils ont qualifiées « d'innovantes » et à les considérer, dans plusieurs cas, comme une réponse à cette crise du providentialisme (Lévesque, Fontan et Klein, 2014). De manière plus large, le concept ou


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« quasi-concept » d'innovation sociale a été utilisé pour saisir la reconfiguration du partage des responsabilités entre l'État, le marché, la famille et la communauté face aux nouveaux risques sociaux (Jenson, 2015).

Les organisations du tiers secteur n'ont donc pas été les seules à chercher une alternative à la crise de l'État-providence. D'autres acteurs sociaux favorables au secteur marchand ont proposé une privatisation accrue des services comme solution à la crise du fordisme et du providentialisme. On a vu alors le concept de *welfare mix* se développer au cours des années 1990 pour mettre en relief le rôle accru assumé par le secteur marchand—et dans une certaine mesure aussi par le tiers secteur—dans la reconfiguration des politiques publiques et dans l'offre de services définie jusque-là principalement par le secteur public (Evers et Laville, 2004).

De fait, à l'aube du XXIe siècle, la complexité des problèmes socioéconomiques a exigé, de plus en plus, l'implication d'une pluralité d'acteurs dépassant la simple redistribution ou la concurrence. Il est devenu nécessaire de reconnaître «l'efficacité d'approches misant sur l'horizontalité, l'intersectorialité et l'interdisciplinarité [qui] font en sorte que les politiques sociales ne peuvent plus être élaborées exclusivement par l'État même assisté d'une technocratie et d'une administration publique compétente » (Lévesque et Thiry, 2008, p. 251). L'innovation sociale peut alors se conjuguer avec le concept de co-construction pour rendre compte de processus d'interactions entre diverses parties prenantes qui se concertent, délibèrent, négocient et établissent des compromis afin de définir de nouvelles politiques publiques (Vaillancourt, 2019).

L'action des organisations du tiers secteur peut se présenter comme une réponse à ces nouveaux défis puisqu'elle se caractérise par une porosité qui leur permet d'être à la fois au-dedans et au-dehors d'un espace institutionnel qui reste tiraillé par diverses orientations sociales, économiques, politiques et culturelles. Cette position stratégique est particulièrement favorable à l'émergence de l'innovation sociale (Goldenger *et al.*, 2009), puisqu'en plus de favoriser la rencontre et l'agencement de savoirs profanes et professionnels (Caillouette et Soussi, 2014), elle permet de tisser des liens entre des champs d'action et des acteurs qui, autrement, n'auraient jamais eu l'occasion d'œuvrer conjointement, comme le démontrent d'ailleurs nos trois études de cas. Le financement gouvernemental joue également un rôle crucial dans le maintien et le développement des organisations du tiers secteur, les modèles de financement axés sur la citoyenneté se montrant plus favorables à l'innovation sociale que ceux axés sur la charité ou l'offre de services (Philips, Laforest et Graham, 2010).

Plus explicitement, l'innovation sociale peut être définie « comme une activité nouvelle qui prend forme et se diffuse dans un contexte donné » (Bouchard, 2011, p. 5). Elle peut être circonscrite à partir de pratiques et d'activités sociales ou économiques favorisant l'émancipation de personnes ou de groupe de personnes subissant une marginalisation et souvent aux prises avec des problèmes d'accès aux services ou activités leur permettant d'assumer leur pleine citoyenneté. Dans certains cas, il peut aussi s'agir de situations où les personnes font face à l'absence de services, d'activités ou de pratiques développés spécifiquement pour répondre à leurs besoins ou combler leurs aspirations (Howaldt et Schwarz, 2010). Certes, on ne peut attribuer à l'innovation sociale un sens univoque; elle ne se présente pas toujours comme une pratique émancipatrice pour l'ensemble des acteurs concernés (Laville, 2016; Mulgan, 2015). De même, il faut considérer que le caractère innovant des pratiques peut parfois se révéler a posteriori, ou « chemin faisant », sans qu'elle ait fait l'objet au départ d'une visée consciente des acteurs qui l'ont suscitée (Richez-Battesti, 2011).

Par ailleurs, comme l'ont montré des chercheurs dans le contexte canadien (Westley *et al*., 2014), l'augmentation de la portée (*scaling up*) des innovations sociales peut prendre différentes configurations et dépend des conditions de départ des initiatives (objectifs, vision du changement, etc.), des compétences et des ressources dont disposent les promoteurs ainsi que des occasions et des obstacles rencontrés. Tout en reconnaissant la diversité des trajectoires poursuivies par


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l'innovation sociale, notre étude cherche à identifier les stratégies récurrentes utilisées par les organismes communautaires pour institutionnaliser leurs pratiques afin de mieux comprendre leur apport à l'évolution des politiques sociales. Pour cerner cet aspect, nous proposons de nous tourner vers la notion de travail institutionnel.

## INSTITUTIONNALISME SOCIOLOGIQUE ET TRAVAIL INSTITUTIONNEL

La notion de travail institutionnel tire son origine de la théorie néo-institutionnelle, plus précisément de l'institutionnalisme sociologique, l'une des trois branches fondatrices de ce courant théorique (Lecours, 2002; Hall et Taylor, 1997).[1] Apparu durant les années 1980 dans le domaine de la théorie des organisations, l'institutionnalisme sociologique part d'une critique de la rationalité instrumentale associée au développement de la bureaucratie pour souligner que plusieurs formes et procédures utilisées par les organisations modernes ne sont pas mises en place simplement parce qu'elles sont plus efficaces, mais bien parce qu'il s'agit de pratiques culturelles transmises (Hall et Taylor, 1997). Au départ, l'approche cherchait surtout à comprendre les rapports de similitude que peuvent entretenir entre elles les organisations qui partagent les mêmes conditions institutionnelles, en regardant principalement du côté du pouvoir facilitant et contraignant des institutions (thèse de l'isomorphisme institutionnel). Au milieu des années 2000, dans une contribution majeure sur la question, Lawrence et Suddaby (2006) ont proposé d'inverser le regard en examinant plutôt le rôle que peuvent jouer les acteurs dans le développement des institutions. Dans cette optique, ces auteurs ont avancé le concept de travail institutionnel, défini par ces derniers comme « the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions » (Lawrence et Suddaby, 2006, p. 215).

Théoriquement, le concept s'appuie sur les rares travaux qui s'étaient intéressés jusque-là à l'agentivité dans les études institutionnelles concernant les organisations, notamment les écrits basés sur la figure de l'entrepreneur institutionnel (DiMaggio, 1988) qui reconnaissaient déjà la capacité qu'ont certains acteurs à modifier leur environnement institutionnel. Le concept s'inspire aussi de la sociologie des pratiques, une tradition de recherche associée à des auteurs tels que Pierre Bourdieu et Anthony Giddens, qui comprend l'activité humaine comme un ensemble d'interprétations partagées s'incarnant matériellement et symboliquement dans des pratiques. Selon Lawrence et Suddaby (2006), toute analyse portant sur le travail institutionnel doit reposer sur trois éléments clés : souligner la compétence et la réflexivité des acteurs individuels et collectifs, reconnaître que les institutions sont constituées par l'action plus ou moins consciente des acteurs, et appréhender l'action par les pratiques des acteurs.

Le concept a rapidement eu un écho dans la littérature. En introduction de l'ouvrage *Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organization*, paru à la fin des années 2000, Lawrence, Suddaby et Lecca (2009) rappelaient que l'analyse du travail institutionnel doit se focaliser sur les activités des individus et des organisations et non sur leurs accomplissements, étant donné que les conséquences du travail institutionnel peuvent parfois être non anticipées, voire même non désirées. Les auteurs réitéraient également l'importance de l'intentionnalité dans la définition du travail institutionnel de manière à le distinguer des actions non volontaires pouvant aussi avoir un impact sur le développement des institutions. Enfin, ils soulignaient le rôle de l'effort dans le travail institutionnel, supposant une prise de distance critique des acteurs face aux pratiques institutionnalisées.

Parmi les trois types de travail institutionnel identifiés dans la définition du concept[2], la création institutionnelle est certainement celui qui s'applique le mieux à notre problématique de recherche. Représentant le type de travail institutionnel le plus étudié, celui-ci renvoie de manière générale à la mise en place de nouvelles pratiques ou de nouvelles routines institutionnelles (Lawrence et Suddaby, 2006). Selon Ben Slimane et Lecca (2010, pp. 61–62), le travail de création institutionnelle désigne plus spécifiquement « les opérations visant à la fois à assurer une légitimité [aux] nouvelles pratiques vis-à-vis des parties prenantes les plus susceptibles de favoriser, ou d'empêcher, leur développement, ainsi que les opérations visant à doter l'activité de règles de fonctionnement propres. » Ce travail de création institutionnelle


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peut être à son tour subdivisé en trois dimensions : politique, cognitive et normative (Zerdani et Bouchard, 2016). Dans leurs tentatives de faire reconnaître et d'obtenir du financement de la part de l'État québécois pour soutenir leurs pratiques novatrices, les organismes communautaires que nous avons étudiés ont tous exercé ce type de travail institutionnel.

## MÉTHODOLOGIE ET PRÉSENTATION DES CAS

Notre démarche s'appuie sur une stratégie de recherche par étude de cas multiples, comprenant une analyse interne de chacun des trois cas retenus et une comparaison entre ceux-ci.[3] Cette stratégie de type inductif est justifiée dans le contexte où, comme le soulignent George et Bennett (2005, p. 18), « There is a growing consensus that the strongest means of drawing inferences from case studies is the use of a combination of within-case analysis and cross-case comparisons within a single study or research program ». La comparaison a été traitée comme une mise en perspective permettant de stimuler la réflexion sur chacun des cas (Levy, 2007, p. 6). Elle a été rendue possible par le fait que les processus d'institutionnalisation observés partageaient certaines conditions communes : un même palier politique (provincial), un même domaine d'activités (santé et services sociaux) et une même période de temps dans la transformation de l'État-providence (les années 1990 et 2000).

La sélection des cas s'est faite en fonction de critères précis. Les pratiques développées par les organismes communautaires devaient : 1) apporter une réponse nouvelle à des besoins sociaux et/ou des besoins non satisfaits par l'État ou le marché; 2) s'inscrire dans le domaine de la santé et des services sociaux; et 3) avoir fait l'objet d'une tentative d'institutionnalisation, amorcée ou complétée. Afin de tirer profit de la perspective de la comparaison, nous avons fait le choix de sélectionner des pratiques dont le degré d'institutionnalisation variait : une ayant été formellement intégrée aux politiques sociales (soutien communautaire en logement social) et deux dont l'intégration était plus partielle (approche Carpe Diem et GAM).

Chacun des cas a été documenté à l'aide d'une série d'entretiens et d'une collecte documentaire réalisées entre 2010 et 2014. Au total, 45 entretiens individuels semi-dirigés ont été menés (10 dans le cas de Carpe Diem, 14 dans le cas de la GAM et 21 dans le cas du soutien communautaire en logement social).[4] Les entretiens ont été faits à la fois avec des salariés des organismes communautaires (coordonnateurs, représentants et intervenants) et des représentants du secteur public, incluant des fonctionnaires impliqués directement dans l'encadrement des pratiques et certains anciens élus ayant occupé des fonctions dans le réseau de la santé et des services sociaux. Les questions portaient sur les origines de la pratique, ses caractéristiques, son évolution et son institutionnalisation, en accordant une attention particulière aux stratégies adoptées par les organismes communautaires durant ce processus.

L'ensemble des entretiens a été retranscrit intégralement et a par la suite été codifié en fonction d'une grille d'analyse préétablie (Comeau 2000). La codification a porté sur le contenu manifeste des entretiens (Miles et Huberman 2003). Ce corpus a été complété par la littérature gouvernementale disponible sur les pratiques novatrices (études, documents-cadres, etc.), des documents produits par les organismes à l'origine des innovations (guides de formation, descriptifs d'activités, etc.) et certains rapports de recherche portant sur les approches étudiées.

Ces données ont permis de reconstituer et de séquencer avec précision les processus d'institutionnalisation en identifiant leurs principaux points tournants. Les trois cas ont d'abord fait l'objet d'une analyse individuelle, publiée sous forme de monographie (Bergeron-Gaudin et Jetté, 2020; Jetté *et al.*, 2019; Carpentier, Bergeron-Gaudin et Jetté, 2013), avant d'être comparés. Nous présentons sommairement les trois pratiques :

> *L'approche Carpe Diem.* Développée dans la ville de Trois-Rivières, cette première pratique s'inscrit dans le champ du vieillissement et s'adresse aux personnes souffrant de la maladie d'Alzheimer. L'approche a été


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conçue par un organisme communautaire autonome, Carpe Diem – Centre de ressources Alzheimer, un groupe créé en 1985. À contrecourant des logiques institutionnelles de placement et de médicalisation, Carpe Diem propose un modèle d'accompagnement basé sur le respect de la dignité, la qualité du contact relationnel entre les intervenants et les personnes atteintes ainsi que l'implication des proches dans le traitement de la maladie (Lalande et Leclerc, 2004). L'organisme a ouvert sa première maison d'hébergement en 1996 et prévoit en ouvrir une deuxième au cours des prochaines années. En plus de ce volet résidentiel, Carpe Diem a aussi développé un centre de jour, un service d'accompagnement à domicile, des groupes d'entraide et une offre de rencontre avec les familles des personnes atteintes, l'intégration des services étant au fondement même de l'approche.

*La Gestion autonome de la médication.* Cette deuxième pratique novatrice émane de la prise de parole de personnes vivant avec un trouble de santé mentale et consommant des médicaments psychotropes. Développée à partir de 1993 au sein du Regroupement des ressources alternatives en santé mentale du Québec (RRASMQ), avec l'appui d'une équipe de recherche universitaire (l'Équipe de recherche et d'action en santé mentale et culture [ÉRASME]) et de l'Association des organismes d'intervention en défense des droits en santé mentale du Québec (AGIDD-SMQ), la GAM vise à redonner aux personnes du pouvoir sur leur rétablissement, en encourageant la prise en compte de leur point de vue et de leur subjectivé dans l'ajustement de leur médication. La pratique prévoit un accompagnement individuel et collectif, incluant de la formation, de l'information sur la médication et la participation à des groupes d'entraide (Rodriguez et Poirel, 2007). La GAM a connu trois projets pilotes : un premier initié par les groupes promoteurs (RRASMQ, AGIDD-SMQ et ÉRASME) où l'approche a été expérimentée dans dix ressources alternatives en santé mentale de 1998 à 2001, un second financé par le ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) où l'approche a été implantée systématiquement dans trois régions du Québec (Lanaudière, Gaspésie et secteur nord de Montréal) de 2002 à 2005 et un troisième, plus récent, où l'approche a été consolidée dans cinq organismes membres du RRASMQ de 2016 à 2018 (Poirel, Lauzier et Pavois, 2018). Un forum international sur la GAM, aussi financé par le MSSS, a également été organisé en 2007.

*Le soutien communautaire en logement social.* Expérimentée à la fin des années 1980 par la Fédération des OSBL d'habitation de Montréal (FOHM), cette pratique visait à l'origine à assurer la stabilité résidentielle des personnes vulnérables à risque d'itinérance dans un contexte d'augmentation du nombre de sans-abris (Jetté *et al.*, 1998). L'idée était d'offrir un logement social et un accompagnement directement dans le milieu de vie pour éviter que les personnes ne retournent ou se retrouvent à la rue. Au fil de sa diffusion au sein du secteur des OSBL d'habitation durant les années 1990, la pratique a progressivement été élargie à d'autres groupes cibles (personnes âgées, personnes ayant un problème de santé mentale, etc.). Le soutien communautaire englobe un ensemble varié d'activités, « allant de l'accueil à la référence, en passant par l'accompagnement auprès de services publics, la gestion des conflits entre locataires, l'intervention en situation de crise, l'intervention psychosociale, le support au comité de locataires et aux autres comités et l'organisation communautaire » (Gouvernement du Québec, 2007, p. 8). La lutte pour sa reconnaissance et son financement a été essentiellement portée par la FOHM et le Réseau québécois des OSBL d'habitation (RQOH), fondé en 2000, notamment pour cette raison. À partir de 2002, à la suite d'un changement législatif reconnaissant la mission sociale des offices municipaux d'habitation (OMH) responsables du logement public, ce milieu a lui aussi commencé à s'approprier la pratique. Après avoir bénéficié de mesures ponctuelles de financement[5], le soutien communautaire en logement social a reçu un appui financier permanent de 5 M$ en 2007 après quatre ans de concertation entre le gouvernement et le milieu communautaire pour élaborer un cadre de référence encadrant la pratique.


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## LES FORMES DE TRAVAIL INSTITUTIONNEL

Conscients que le travail institutionnel peut comporter une dimension politique (*advocacy*) e une dimension cognitive (systèmes de sens), nous avons fait le choix de concentrer la présentation de nos résultats sur la dimension normative (systèmes de croyances) de cette notion. Ce choix est justifié d'une part par la récurrence de cette dimension dans nos trois études de cas et d'autre part par son importance pour expliquer la variation entre les processus d'institutionnalisation observés. Deux formes de travail institutionnel seront examinées : la constitution de réseaux normatifs et la construction d'identités.

### Constitution de réseaux normatifs

Dans leurs travaux, Lawrence et Suddaby (2006) reconnaissent la constitution de réseaux normatifs comme l'une des formes importantes de travail institutionnel. Selon eux, celle-ci renvoie aux connexions inter-organisationnelles qui sont créées par les acteurs et qui permettent de sanctionner les nouvelles pratiques en tant que normes (Lawrence et Suddaby, 2006, p. 221). Cette première forme de travail institutionnel a été observée dans nos trois cas. Les organismes promoteurs ont tous, à un moment ou à un autre du processus d'institutionnalisation, établi des connexions avec d'autres groupes communautaires intervenant dans leur secteur ainsi qu'avec des fonctionnaires, des professionnels (médecins, gestionnaires et intervenants sociaux selon les cas) et des chercheurs afin de partager et soutenir leur pratique. Ils l'ont cependant fait de manière différente.

Le cas du soutien communautaire en logement social s'est avéré particulièrement intéressant sur cet aspect. Comme mentionné, la pratique a été initiée en 1987 par la FOHM, un regroupement d'OSBL d'habitation de la région de Montréal alors nouvellement formé, qui comptait une vingtaine de groupes et qui rejoignait essentiellement des personnes seules et vulnérables, dont plusieurs présentaient des problèmes d'alcoolisme ou de toxicomanie. Le premier projet pilote qui a permis d'expérimenter la pratique a été financé par le MSSS, mais la gestion des fonds a été confiée à la Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) et à l'OMH de Montréal. Le projet a rapidement démontré que la pratique du soutien communautaire permettait d'assurer une meilleure stabilité résidentielle chez les personnes à risque d'itinérance.

Au milieu des années 1990, des OSBL d'habitation de Hull (aujourd'hui Gatineau) et Québec, deux autres centres urbains où le nombre de sans-abris était également en croissance, ont pris contact avec la FOHM pour implanter la pratique dans leur milieu. En l'absence de structure de représentation dans ces régions, ces démarches ont amené ces groupes à se doter de regroupements régionaux à l'image de la FOHM. Parallèlement, des OSBL d'habitation pour personnes âgées, principalement situés dans la région du Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean, mettaient aussi sur pied une association nationale pour défendre leurs intérêts. Des échanges entre cette association et les fédérations régionales pratiquant le soutien communautaire ont rapidement mené à la conclusion que le milieu des OSBL d'habitation au Québec devait parler d'une seule voix, ce qui a entraîné en 2000 la création du RQOH, dont le premier objectif a été de faire reconnaître la pratique. Ces connexions ont été déterminantes dans l'élargissement du soutien communautaire à d'autres types de populations vulnérables que les personnes à risque d'itinérance, notamment les personnes âgées. L'argument avancé était que la pratique, sous des modalités variables, pouvait également favoriser la stabilité résidentielle chez ces dernières et donc, leur maintien à domicile.

Tout au long des années 1990, la FOHM a également maintenu des relations étroites avec certains fonctionnaires de la SHQ, qui se sont impliqués dans le développement de la pratique dès le premier projet pilote. Dans le contexte où la SHQ ne pouvait financer que le cadre bâti et non les services offerts dans les logements, ces fonctionnaires ont travaillé activement à l'intérieur de l'administration pour tenter d'amener le MSSS à s'intéresser et à soutenir la pratique. Comme le résumait en entrevue un fonctionnaire de la SHQ impliqué dans le dossier, « on a cogné à la porte du ministère je ne sais combien de fois! » (Entretien C4).


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Des connexions ont aussi été établies avec le milieu de la recherche. En 1998, une première étude évaluative sur la pratique, conduite par le Laboratoire de recherche sur les pratiques et politiques sociales (LAREPPS) de l'Université du Québec à Montréal, démontrait que le soutien communautaire améliorait la qualité de vie des personnes rejointes, entre autres en renforçant leurs liens sociaux (Jetté *et al.*, 1998). Menée sous un mode partenarial en collaboration avec la FOHM, cette étude a permis de formaliser davantage la pratique, de mesurer ses effets et comme le soulignait en entrevue une salariée de l'organisme à l'époque, de donner plus de crédibilité à l'approche : « Ça faisait des années que je parlais de notre expérience en essayant de démontrer comment c'était important, mais là je pouvais m'appuyer sur une équipe de scientifiques qui pouvaient faire des démonstrations » (Entretien C3).

En 2002, le milieu des OMH a également commencé à s'approprier la pratique, du moins à utiliser le terme de « soutien communautaire » pour désigner un ensemble de pratiques apparentées qu'il avait lui-même développées au fil du temps, surtout à Montréal, en employant le terme d'« action communautaire » (Morin, Aubry et Vaillancourt, 2007). Alors que la RQOH faisait pression auprès du gouvernement pour obtenir un programme de financement dédié à la pratique et réservé exclusivement aux OSBL d'habitation, l'arrivée des OMH a créé des tensions importantes entre les deux milieux (Jetté et Bergeron-Gaudin, 2017), mais a tout de même conduit à une extension du réseau normatif autour de la pratique.

À la suite des élections provinciales de 2003, le gouvernement libéral nouvellement élu a pris la décision de mettre en place une démarche de concertation devant mener à l'adoption d'un cadre de référence sur la pratique. D'une durée de quatre ans, cette démarche a réuni des représentants du milieu des OSBL d'habitation (FOHM et RQOH) et du milieu des OMH et des fonctionnaires des réseaux de la santé et des services sociaux et de l'habitation, se voulant un exemple d'action intersectorielle gouvernementale (Gouvernement du Québec 2007). En 2007, lors de l'adoption du cadre de référence, auquel était finalement rattaché une enveloppe de 5 M$, la pratique bénéficiait donc de l'appui des deux réseaux institutionnels et des deux principales filières en logement social au Québec (OSBL d'habitation et OMH). Elle représentait déjà, en ce sens, une norme importante d'intervention dans son domaine.

Le travail institutionnel exercé par les groupes promoteurs pour constituer un réseau normatif s'est manifesté de manière différente dans le cas de la GAM. D'abord, la pratique, initiée en 1993, a été développée par deux regroupements nationaux déjà établis. Le premier, le RRASMQ, avait été créé en 1983 et réunissait une centaine d'organismes communautaires en santé mentale autour d'une vision globale de la personne et d'une réappropriation du pouvoir des individus. Le second, l'AGIDD-SMQ, avait été fondé en 1990 et rassemblait une vingtaine de groupes qui militaient pour la reconnaissance et l'exercice des droits des personnes aux prises avec un problème de santé mentale. Ainsi, contrairement au soutien communautaire en logement social, le travail institutionnel réalisé par les promoteurs de la GAM n'a pas engendré de nouveau regroupement d'organismes. Il s'est plutôt appuyé sur deux réseaux déjà formés.

Autre distinction par rapport au soutien communautaire : la GAM a également profité, dès sa conception et tout au long de son développement, de l'accompagnement d'une équipe de recherche universitaire, ÉRASME, qui était aussi intéressée à trouver des alternatives à la médication des problèmes de santé mentale. Cet accompagnement a contribué à formaliser la pratique et a permis une forme de co-construction des savoirs, combinant les savoirs scientifiques et les savoirs pratiques et expérientiels des usagers et des intervenants. Ce dispositif de recherche partenariale, qui se maintient encore aujourd'hui, a aussi assuré une plus grande visibilité à la pratique à travers certaines publications scientifiques (Rodriguez et Poirel, 2007; Rodriguez, 2005).

C'est en 1998 que les groupes promoteurs de la GAM ont saisi l'occasion créée par l'adoption d'un nouveau plan d'action gouvernementale en santé mentale pour obtenir du financement afin de lancer un premier projet pilote. Ce plan d'action reconnaissait l'importance primordiale de « redonner un sentiment de maîtrise sur sa vie » aux personnes vivant des


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problèmes de santé mentale (MSSS 1998a, p. 17). Le démarrage du premier projet pilote coïncidait avec la parution d'un rapport produit par un comité ministériel du MSSS, dans lequel des médecins s'interrogeaient sur les enjeux éthiques liés à la prescription de médicaments (MSSS, 1998b). Les groupes promoteurs ont établi des contacts avec des membres de ce comité afin de leur faire connaître la GAM, dont les principes n'étaient pas très éloignés des conclusions du rapport. Ils ont aussi commencé à la même période à approcher certains psychiatres pour que ceux-ci intègrent la GAM à leur pratique et participent à des activités de formation afin de sensibiliser leurs collègues à l'approche. D'autres connexions ont été faites avec des fonctionnaires de la Direction de la santé mentale et du Comité de la santé mentale au MSSS. Comme le confirmait en entrevue une chercheuse impliquée dans le développement de la pratique, « il y avait des acteurs à l'intérieur du ministère qui comprenaient la GAM » (Entrevue B11).

Lors d'un forum national sur la santé mentale organisé en septembre 2000 pour faire le bilan de l'implantation du plan d'action gouvernementale, la GAM a été mise de l'avant par un groupe de travail sur la transformation des services en santé mentale, qui regroupait plusieurs fonctionnaires sensibilisés à la pratique. Les échanges tenus dans le cadre de ce forum ont été synthétisés en 2001 dans un document intitulé *Accentuer la transformation des services de santé mentale*, dans lequel le ministère s'engageait explicitement à « soutenir des projets visant la gestion autonome des médicaments » (MSSS, 2001, p. 24). Cette reconnaissance a mené au second projet pilote sur la pratique, financé par le MSSS, mais visant à étendre la diffusion de la GAM en dehors du milieu communautaire en l'intégrant au secteur public.

Or, la poursuite de l'institutionnalisation de la pratique au-delà du second projet pilote a été freinée par l'affaiblissement du réseau normatif que les groupes promoteurs avaient réussi à construire. Dans son nouveau plan d'action en matière de santé mentale en 2005, *La force des liens*, le MSSS ne faisait plus référence à la GAM (MSSS, 2005). Cet étiolement des relations entre les groupes promoteurs et le secteur public à cette période s'explique en partie par les bouleversements apportés au système de santé et des services sociaux par la réforme de 2003, inspirée des préceptes de la Nouvelle Gestion publique (NGP) avec une approche plus managériale des services se prêtant mal à la GAM. Ces bouleversements administratifs ont aussi provoqué un mouvement important de personnel au sein du secteur public, qui s'est traduit par une perte des connexions établies par le RRASMQ et l'AGIDD-SMQ. Le Commissaire à la santé et au bien-être (CSBE) relevait toutefois en 2012 la cohérence de la GAM avec les orientations du réseau de la santé et des services sociaux et ce, même si « elle n'est pas sans susciter des inquiétudes chez certains professionnels » (CSBE, 2012, p. 51).

Il est important de spécifier que certains organismes communautaires en santé mentale ont eux aussi toujours fait preuve de méfiance ou de difficulté à s'approprier la GAM. En effet, comme le souligne un récent rapport publié par le RRASMQ et ÉRASME concernant le troisième projet pilote sur la pratique mené de 2016 à 2018, il subsiste « d'importants défis […] face à l'implantation de l'approche et de pratiques GAM » et « malgré des percées significatives dans certaines ressources alternatives, plusieurs acteurs font depuis quelques années le constat d'importantes limites dans l'approche » (Poirel, Lauzier et Pavois 2018, p. 7). Comparativement au soutien communautaire en logement social où la pratique a été véritablement le moteur de nouvelles connexions entre les groupes communautaires, la GAM s'est diffusée dans un réseau d'organismes regroupés avant tout autour de valeurs (autonomie, participation, réappropriation du pouvoir, etc.) qui peuvent se traduire différemment dans les approches d'intervention. Cet élément, jumelé à l'effritement du partenariat entre les groupes promoteurs et le secteur public, constituent des pistes d'explication à l'institutionnalisation incomplète de la GAM.

La constitution du réseau normatif autour de Carpe Diem a pris une trajectoire plus simple, qui tient en bonne partie au fait que la pratique repose surtout sur l'initiative individuelle de la fondatrice et directrice de l'organisme plutôt que sur un acteur collectif. Comme mentionné ci-dessus, le groupe a été créé en 1985. À l'origine, il portait le nom de Carpe Diem


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– Société Alzheimer de la Mauricie et du Centre-du-Québec. En 1986, la directrice de l'organisme a participé à la fondation de la Fédération québécoise des sociétés d'Alzheimer (FQSA), qui visait à représenter les sociétés régionales telles que Carpe Diem à l'échelle nationale. Dès ses débuts, la FQSA a mis de l'avant « une approche humaniste dans l'accompagnement des personnes atteintes de la maladie d'Alzheimer et des maladies apparentées ainsi que de leurs proches » (Carpe Diem, 2019). La directrice de Carpe Diem a joué un rôle actif au sein de la Fédération tout au long des années 1990 et 2000, allant jusqu'à occuper la fonction de présidente de 1992 à 1996. En 2009, Carpe Diem a cependant décidé de se dissocier de la FQSA, entraînant le changement de nom de l'organisme, renommé Carpe Diem – Centre de ressources Alzheimer l'année suivante. Selon un représentant de la FQSA, cette décision trouve notamment son origine dans le choix du terme utilisé pour désigner l'approche de la Fédération, une « approche humaniste centrée sur la personne », alors que Carpe Diem aurait préféré qu'elle parle littéralement de l'« approche Carpe Diem » (Entrevue A12).

Comme pour les deux autres pratiques, une étude, menée en 2004 par une équipe du Centre de recherche sur le vieillissement de l'Université de Sherbrooke, a également permis de faire des liens avec le milieu de la recherche et démontrer les effets bénéfiques de la pratique, entre autres concernant la prise de médicaments chez les personnes hébergées (Lalande et Leclerc 2004). Plusieurs professionnels des établissements de santé et de services sociaux au Québec ont également été sensibilisés à l'approche par le biais des formations offertes par la directrice de l'organisme au fil des années. Certains ministres du gouvernement québécois étaient également bien au fait des pratiques développées par l'organisme. Mais ce succès d'estime n'a pas pour autant permis leur diffusion à grande échelle. Il a tout au plus permis d'obtenir certaines dérogations administratives facilitant le financement de l'approche globale promue par l'organisme.[6]

Dans l'ensemble, notre analyse montre donc que l'institutionnalisation des pratiques novatrices des organismes communautaires nécessite la formation d'un réseau normatif, à la fois au sein du milieu communautaire et entre celui-ci et le secteur public. La variation entre nos cas au regard du degré d'institutionnalisation des pratiques indique par ailleurs que ce travail institutionnel de la part des groupes promoteurs doit s'inscrire sur un temps long pour mener à une réelle reconnaissance et un encadrement de l'innovation sociale. De fait, le réseau normatif constitué autour du soutien communautaire en logement social a été maintenu et même élargi, avec l'intégration « forcée » du milieu du logement public, pendant les vingt ans qui ont séparé son expérimentation en 1987 et son institutionnalisation complète en 2007. Cette durabilité du réseau normatif n'a pas été observée dans les deux autres cas, pour des raisons différentes que nous avons évoquées. Dans la lignée de l'institutionnalisme sociologique, ce résultat confirme que le changement institutionnel lié à l'adoption d'une nouvelle norme de pratique dans un secteur donné demande du temps et constitue un processus de longue durée.

**Construction d'identités**

Un autre résultat marquant de notre étude est la relation étroite qui est apparue entre les pratiques novatrices et l'identité des groupes promoteurs et, conséquemment, l'important travail identitaire suscité par l'institutionnalisation. Lawrence et Suddaby (2006) considèrent la construction d'identités comme une forme de travail institutionnel, également de type normatif, qui permet de définir les fondements moraux et culturels des pratiques. Dans les trois cas, les organismes promoteurs ont exercé cette forme de travail institutionnel, bien souvent en mettant de l'avant les valeurs qui sous-tendent leurs interventions et qui les distinguent des approches plus traditionnelles utilisées par le secteur public. Ce travail a toutefois eu des effets différenciés sur le processus d'institutionnalisation en lui-même.

Dans le cas de Carpe Diem, c'est précisément ce travail de construction identitaire qui explique en grande partie le retrait de l'organisme de son regroupement national, la FQSA, en 2009. Bien que l'approche Carpe Diem ait été reconnue officieusement comme l'approche commune de la Fédération, cette dernière, comme nous l'avons souligné, n'a jamais


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utilisé explicitement cette appellation, puisqu'il s'agissait du nom de l'une de ses sociétés membres. Cette mise sous silence de l'origine de l'approche est devenue au fil du temps une source de désaccord, voire de conflit, entre la direction de Carpe Diem et la Fédération qui ne s'entendaient plus sur les principes à respecter pour adhérer à la FQSA. L'organisme a reproché à la Fédération sa tolérance envers certaines sociétés régionales d'Alzheimer dont les pratiques s'écartaient de manière significative de l'approche promue par Carpe Diem, notamment parce qu'elles concluaient des ententes de service avec le secteur public, ce qui venait selon la directrice de l'organisme entamer l'autonomie des groupes et l'originalité de leurs pratiques (Entrevue A3).

Le même genre de tension identitaire a été observé dans le cas du soutien communautaire en logement social, plus particulièrement chez la FOHM. Il faut savoir qu'à la fin des années 1980 et tout au long des années 1990, l'organisme employait plutôt les termes de logement social avec « support communautaire » pour nommer la pratique. Ce n'est que dans les années 2000, dans la foulée des négociations entourant l'élaboration du cadre de référence sur la pratique, que l'appellation de « soutien communautaire » en logement social s'est imposée. D'après un fonctionnaire de la SHQ, ce changement aurait été motivé par des raisons avant tout d'ordre linguistique : « On a traduit parce que les gens [au gouvernement] n'aimaient pas "support communautaire". Il y a des gens à Québec qui ont pensé que c'était une traduction de l'anglais "*community support*" » (Entrevue C4). Or, comme pour Carpe Diem, les mots utilisés pour désigner une approche ont leur importance, entre autres dans la façon dont les organismes communautaires se représentent et conçoivent leurs interventions. Ce procédé d'identification à la pratique est manifeste dans ce témoignage d'une ancienne représentante de la FOHM : « Moi j'ai eu une pratique en logement social avec support communautaire. […] Donc moi ma pratique, mon expérience, ma vision des choses par rapport à la population qui était visée, c'était de faire du logement avec support communautaire. Vous me parlez de soutien communautaire avec logement, pour moi il y a un décalage dans le concept » (Entrevue C3).

Contrairement à Carpe Diem, ce travail de construction identitaire n'a toutefois pas amené la FOHM à se désaffilier de son regroupement national ou à se retirer de la concertation avec le gouvernement concernant le cadre de référence sur la pratique. Le cadre a néanmoins été accueilli tièdement par le milieu des OSBL d'habitation, certains de ses représentants critiquant le fait que le soutien communautaire s'y limite à une simple liste d'activités, même si la définition présentée s'inspirait fortement de celle développée dans le premier rapport de recherche sur l'expérience fondatrice de la FOHM (Jetté *et al.*, 1998). À la fin des années 2000, la FOHM a même cru bon de s'engager dans une nouvelle démarche collective de réflexion visant à définir clairement ce qu'est le soutien communautaire en logement social et à réaffirmer les principes et les valeurs à la base de la pratique. Cette démarche a donné lieu à la parution d'un manuel de formation (FOHM, 2011) dans lequel on rappelait les fondements de la pratique (conscientisation, *empowerment*, droits de la personne, etc.).

Le scénario a été différent dans le cas de la GAM, dans la mesure où, comme nous l'avons souligné, la pratique a été portée dès le départ par un réseau consolidé d'organismes communautaires, réunis au sein de deux regroupements (RRASMQ et AGIDD-SMQ) qui avaient déjà accompli un travail préalable de construction identitaire pour mobiliser leurs membres. Ce partage préalable de principes et de valeurs n'a néanmoins pas suffi à assurer une appropriation pleine et entière de la pratique par les groupes membres des deux regroupements. Par exemple, lors du second projet pilote mené de 2002 à 2005 dans trois régions, certains organismes devant participer ont exprimé des réticences, voire ont refusé de s'engager dans le projet, n'y voyant pas les avantages et ne se considérant pas non plus suffisamment outillés. Un intervenant communautaire en santé mentale expliquait en entrevue que l'appellation de la GAM continuait aussi d'être une source d'ambiguïté au sein même du milieu, l'approche étant parfois faussement interprétée comme un « appel au sevrage » ou comme de l'« automédication » (Entrevue B13). Cette dynamique rappelle encore une fois l'importance des termes employés pour définir la pratique novatrice et surtout, l'importance de s'entendre sur leur interprétation


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commune, ce que peut permettre le travail de construction identitaire. Ce dernier cas montre que cette forme de travail institutionnel n'est pas simplement une étape préalable à l'institutionnalisation de l'innovation et doit être exercée de façon constante au cours du processus.

Selon les contextes, la construction d'identités peut donc agir comme une condition facilitante ou contraignante pour l'institutionnalisation. Dans les trois cas, le partage d'une identité commune a en effet favorisé la mobilisation des groupes promoteurs à certains moments dans leurs tentatives de faire reconnaître et soutenir leur pratique novatrice par l'État. Dans le cas de Carpe Diem, ce travail identitaire a toutefois fait l'objet d'une contestation au cours du processus d'institutionnalisation, l'organisme considérant que l'approche promue par son regroupement national ne respectait pas suffisamment les fondements de sa pratique. Dans le cas de la GAM, le travail de construction identitaire a été fluctuant en raison notamment des inquiétudes manifestées par certains organismes et professionnels quant à certains aspects de la pratique. Seul le soutien communautaire en logement social a profité d'un travail de construction identitaire constant, qui s'est poursuivi, comme nous l'avons vu, au-delà de sa reconnaissance formelle par l'État, mais qui a surtout permis aux groupes promoteurs de s'interroger sur les façons de diffuser la pratique, en la mettant en oeuvre auprès de différents types de populations vulnérables, sans en altérer les fondements.

## CONCLUSION

Notre étude montre qu'au-delà des actions prises par l'État pour institutionnaliser certaines des pratiques novatrices des groupes communautaires, ces derniers sont des agents actifs qui travaillent à instituer les normes qu'ils souhaitent voir se généraliser dans un domaine particulier d'intervention. L'usage de la notion de travail institutionnel, telle que développé par la théorie néo-institutionnelle, a permis en effet de s'éloigner d'une vision wébérienne de l'institutionnalisation, où seul l'État a le pouvoir politique et symbolique de sanctionner une nouvelle pratique, pour examiner de plus près le rôle que peuvent jouer les groupes communautaires dans ce processus ainsi que les stratégies qu'ils adoptent pour faire reconnaître et éventuellement financer leurs pratiques.

À cet égard, nous nous sommes principalement attardés à la constitution de réseaux normatifs et la construction d'identités, étant donné leur importance dans nos trois études de cas (voir annexe). L'analyse de ces deux formes de travail institutionnel a permis de mieux comprendre la variation entre nos cas au regard du degré d'institutionnalisation des pratiques. Si ce processus s'est avéré complet pour le soutien communautaire en logement social (la mise en réseau et le développement d'alliances ayant permis une certaine reconnaissance de la pratique avant même sa légitimation institutionnelle par l'adoption d'un cadre de référence en 2007), il n'a été que partiel pour les deux autres pratiques étudiées, soit l'approche Carpe Diem et la GAM. Dans ces deux derniers cas, certaines dynamiques liées à la constitution des réseaux normatifs et la construction identitaire ont compromis à divers degrés l'institutionnalisation.

Ainsi, le retrait de Carpe Diem de sa fédération provinciale (FSAQ) a eu pour conséquence de faire reposer sur les seules épaules de la direction de l'organisme la diffusion de l'approche. Or, malgré les qualités d'entreprenariat social manifestes de la direction, et une forte volonté individuelle de faire reconnaître l'approche, cela n'a pu compenser les avantages que procure l'appartenance à un réseau de pratique. Quant à la GAM, l'intensité du travail institutionnel de type normatif effectué par ces acteurs pour la diffuser a fluctué au fil du temps en fonction des priorités des regroupements pour qui l'approche constituait certes un projet important, mais un projet parmi d'autres dans un agenda politique déjà chargé de plusieurs autres enjeux. Ce travail a aussi été fragilisé par une maîtrise et une compréhension variables de la pratique chez certains acteurs susceptibles de la diffuser.

Il faut également souligner que l'approche Carpe Diem et la GAM se sont développées dans un environnement institutionnel se caractérisant par d'importantes rigidités professionnelles et corporatistes liées aux secteurs médico-


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hospitalier et psychiatrique. Manuel diagnostic, guides de pratique, protocoles d'intervention : ces deux approches s'adressent à des personnes particulièrement vulnérables dont la prise en charge est traditionnellement rattachée à des dispositifs d'intervention lourds et fortement balisés. Dès lors, nonobstant l'intensité du travail institutionnel exercé par les promoteurs de l'innovation, les avancées du processus d'institutionnalisation restent tributaires des règles et des normes déjà mises en place. Et, à cet égard, on peut penser que les sillons du « sentier de dépendance » (*path dependency*) auxquels font face ces deux approches sont marqués profondément par le type de pratique, les institutions et les professionnels des secteur public et privé qui évoluent au sein de ces champs d'intervention (maladie d'Alzheimer et santé mentale).

Pour finir, notre étude montre que l'innovation sociale ne devient pas la norme parce que l'État l'a instituée. Au contraire, elle est instituée parce qu'elle est devenue la norme par l'entremise du travail institutionnel des acteurs. L'État est rarement le promoteur de l'innovation, ni même son principal agent de diffusion; il vient plutôt sanctionner et appuyer des pratiques déjà diffusées dans un secteur largement influencé par les promoteurs de l'innovation. Et comme le démontre le cas du soutien communautaire en logement social, l'appropriation et la diffusion de l'innovation sociale en tant que nouvelle norme dans un domaine spécifique d'intervention doivent être envisagées sur le long terme.

## NOTES

1. Dans un article qui demeure un classique à ce jour, Hall et Taylor (1997) affirment que la théorie néo-institutionnelle s'est développée en trois branches relativement distinctes : l'institutionnalisme historique, l'institutionnalisme des choix rationnels et l'institutionnalisme sociologique.
2. En plus de la création institutionnelle, Lawrence et Suddaby (2006) reconnaissent deux types de travail institutionnel : le maintien institutionnel, qui désigne le travail exercé par les acteurs en place pour résister au changement, et la déstabilisation institutionnelle, qui renvoie au travail effectué pour convaincre ou contraindre les acteurs à se détourner des institutions en place.
3. Les résultats présentés sont en grande partie tirés d'un projet de recherche financé par le Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada.
4. Le nombre plus élevé d'entretiens réalisés pour le cas du soutien communautaire en logement social, en comparaison avec les deux autres pratiques, s'explique par notre volonté de documenter la forte variation territoriale dans l'institutionnalisation de la pratique (Jetté et Bergeron-Gaudin, 2017).
5. La première mouture du programme provincial AccèsLogis prévoyait un montant de 1000$ par logement dans le cadre du second volet s'adressant aux personnes âgées de plus de 75 ans ou en légère perte d'autonomie pour développer du soutien communautaire. De 1997 à 2002, 730 unités ont été financées par cette mesure. Au fédéral, l'Initiative de partenariats en action communautaire (IPAC), prévue dans le cadre de l'Initiative nationale pour les sans-abris, a aussi permis de financer un certain nombre de projets de soutien communautaire de 2000 à 2006. (Bergeron-Gaudin et Jetté, 2020).
6. Ces dérogations ont permis notamment à l'organisme de recevoir des sommes en provenance du Programme de soutien aux organismes communautaires (PSOC) pour son volet hébergement permanent, même si la Loi sur les services de santé et les services sociaux du Québec autorise uniquement le financement d'organismes offrant de l'hébergement temporaire (six mois ou moins) pour ce programme (Carpentier, Bergeron-Gaudin et Jetté, 2013).
7. Le tableau est inspiré de Lawrence et Suddaby (2006) et de Zerdani et Bouchard (2016).

## LISTE DES SIGLES ET ACRONYMES

| | |
|---|---|
| AGIDD-SMQ | Association des organismes d'intervention en défense des droits en santé mentale du Québec |
| CLSC | Centres locaux de services communautaires |


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| | |
|---|---|
| CSBE | Commissaire à la santé et au bien-être |
| CSMQ | Comité de la santé mentale du Québec |
| ÉRASME | Équipe de recherche et d'action en santé mentale et culture |
| FOHM | Fédération des OSBL d'habitation de Montréal |
| FQSA | Fédération québécoise des Sociétés d'Alzheimer |
| GAM | Gestion autonome de la médication |
| LAREPPS | Laboratoire de recherche sur les pratiques et les politiques sociales |
| MSSS | Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux |
| NGP | Nouvelle Gestion publique |
| OMH | Office municipal d'habitation |
| OSBL | Organisme sans but lucratif |
| RQOH | Réseau québécois des OSBL d'habitation |
| RRASMQ | Regroupement des ressources alternatives en santé mentale du Québec |
| SHQ | Société d'habitation du Québec |

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## ANNEXE
## Tableau 1 – Synthèse des résultats[7]

| | Formes du travail institutionnel | | Intégration de la pratique aux politiques sociales |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Constitution de réseaux normatifs** | **Construction d'identités** | |
| **Carpe Diem** | Dans un premier temps : intégration à la Fédération québécoise des Sociétés d'Alzheimer<br>Dans un second temps : retrait de la Fédération québécoise des Sociétés Alzheimer<br>Soutien d'acteurs :<br>- Ministres de la SSS<br>- Intervenants sociaux<br>- Chercheurs de U. de Sherbrooke | Tension avec la Fédération québécoise des Sociétés d'Alzheimer concernant la désignation de la pratique : approche humaniste vs approche Carpe Diem<br>Repli sur la définition initiale de la pratique : Carpe Diem - Centre de ressources Alzheimer | Dérogation du MSSS pour l'obtention d'un financement spécifique à Carpe Diem |
| **GAM** | Soutien d'acteurs et de réseaux déjà existants :<br>- RRASMQ<br>- AGIDD<br>-SMQ<br>- Fonctionnaires MSSS-Professionnels (psychiatres, etc.)<br>- Chercheurs ÉRASME | Persistance d'ambiguïtés face à la GAM chez certains membres des groupes promoteurs malgré des valeurs de base communes<br><br>Difficultés de certains acteurs à s'approprier la GAM | Financement d'un projet pilote, inscription de la pratique aux orientations de la politique en santé mentale de 1998 et reconnaissance pondérée de la GAM par le CSBE en 2012 |
| **SCLS** | Soutien d'acteurs et de réseaux déjà existants :<br>- FOHM (OSBL d'habitation)<br>- OMH (habitations à loyer modique)<br>- Fonctionnaires de la SHQ- Fonctionnaires du MSSS<br>- Chercheurs LAREPPS<br>Création d'un nouveau réseau pour soutenir le SCLS : RQOH (OSBL d'habitation) | Passage du concept de support communautaire à celui de soutien communautaire<br><br>Élargissement de la pratique aux aînés<br><br>Poursuite de la réflexion sur la définition du SCLS par la FOHM | Financement permanent attribué à la pratique et adoption d'un cadre de référence en 2007 par le MSSS |


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# Sparking Social Transformation through Cycles of Community-Based Research

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## ABSTRACT

For over five years, Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (SEE), a community partnership in Northern Ontario, has been developing a supportive ecosystem for social enterprise, entrepreneurship, and innovation. This article sheds light on how the SEE partnership has established a broad spectrum of supports and a healthy ecosystem for alternative economies in a northern, rural, and Indigenous region, from an initial focus on youth, with asset mapping and pop-up events, to its current emphasis on regional networking and train-the-trainer programs for economic development officers. This article argues that the partnership's strong emphasis on community engagement and empowerment, and the cyclical nature of the community-based research methodology has enhanced the sustainability of the ecosystem and leads to systemic social innovation and transformation.

## RÉSUMÉ

Depuis plus de cinq ans, Social Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (SEE), un partenariat communautaire dans le Nord de l'Ontario, développe un écosystème favorable à l'entreprise sociale, à l'entrepreneuriat et à l'innovation. Cet article met en lumière la façon dont le partenariat SEE a établi un large éventail de soutiens et un écosystème sain pour les économies alternatives dans une région nordique, rurale et autochtone, d'une focalisation initiale sur les jeunes, avec une cartographie des actifs et des événements pop-up, à son accent actuel sur le réseautage régional et les programmes de formation des formateurs pour les agents de développement économique. Cet article fait valoir que l'accent mis par le partenariat sur l'engagement et l'autonomisation de la communauté, et la nature cyclique de la méthodologie de recherche communautaire a amélioré la durabilité de l'écosystème et conduit à une innovation et une transformation sociales systémiques.

**Keywords / Mots clés** Social entrepreneurial ecosystems; Community-based research cycles; Social innovation / Écosystèmes entrepreneuriaux sociaux; Cycles de recherche communautaires; Innovation sociale


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## BACKGROUND

Northern Ontario, a region historically dominated by resource extractive industry and divided by colonialist policies into three "solitudes" of Indigenous peoples, Francophone settler communities, and Anglophone settler communities, has been particularly challenged in recent decades to establish more sustainable economies and resilient communities. As declining industries such as forestry and mining have substantially reduced workforces and/or left the region, many communities struggle to develop new and more inclusive economies as they also face youth outmigration and an ageing population. As increased awareness of climate change gains momentum, the region also struggles with environmental degradation, often disproportionately affecting Indigenous populations, such as the well-documented mercury poisoning at Grassy Narrows or the more recently identified contamination in Attawapiskat. Communities, business and economic development officers, and policymakers have been challenged to find common ground on which to develop a regional economic development strategy.

Social entrepreneurs are sometimes viewed as potential problem-solvers of critical global economic, social, and environmental issues, and ecosystems to support them have demonstrated value in revitalizing declining regions. Theoretical and empirical research into social entrepreneurship ecosystems is sparse, however. This article sheds light on how one such system was developed in a northern, rural, and Indigenous region; it explores how community-based research—with its iterative cycles of planning, action, and reflection—may contribute to the development and sustainability of such an ecosystem.

Over the past six years, NORDIK Institute has provided leadership to a collaborative of numerous organizations across the region to develop a supportive ecosystem for social enterprise development, social entrepreneurs, and social innovators. The Social Enterprise/Entrepreneurship Evolution (SEE) project has recently (March 31, 2019) completed two major funding cycles: the first three years, funded by Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), focused on developing an ecosystem for social enterprise development for youth; the second funding cycle, a two-year cycle funded by the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Growth (MEDG), focused on social enterprise development (available to all ages) and training for MEDG-funded staff to better support the development of social enterprises.

NORDIK staff used community-based research (CBR) to support the development of a regional ecosystem for social enterprise development and growth. CBR, with its cyclical approach to resolving practical community issues, seemed an ideal methodology to build stronger relationships between and among culturally and geographically isolated communities, as well as foster the development of alternative economies. The numerous collaborators and their networks—including NORDIK's previous relationships with communities and funders within the region, its cross-sectoral experience, and its strengths-based approach to development—served as a foundation for the development of a sustainable social entrepreneurial ecosystem. This article explores the following question: How can CBR methods contribute to social entrepreneurship ecosystem development, particularly in a northern, rural, and Indigenous region?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Social entrepreneurship ecosystems are increasingly viewed as drivers of revitalization in regions experiencing economic decline, and some view social entrepreneurs as being key to solving critical societal issues (Roundy, 2017). Research into social entrepreneurship and ecosystem development has not yet provided substantial insight into these phenomena, however, and has been characterized as an "emerging field" (Howaldt, Kaletka, & Schroder, 2016, p. 2). There is still substantial work to be done in developing a robust theoretical framework supported by empirical data (Roundy, 2017), and this article is intended to address, in part, this gap in earlier research.


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Ben Spigel and Richard Harrison's review (2017) of the more robust literature on commercial entrepreneurial ecosystems reveals resilient ecosystems share a number of characteristics: a) they show high levels of connectivity between ecosystem actors, b) they create new resources that flow through networks, and c) they attract significant new resources to the ecosystem. Additionally, this literature provides some guidance for successful ecosystem development: a) dense social networking mobilizes and integrates knowledge, including knowledge about entrepreneurial processes, which is often facilitated by university research centres; b) they are best led by entrepreneurs rather than top-down leadership; and c) the benefits of the ecosystem usually accrue to entrepreneurs in unrelated sectors (Spigel & Harrison, 2017). Spigel and Harrison (2017) conclude that although entrepreneurial ecosystems can provide substantial benefit to entrepreneurs and start-ups, such benefits may not be distributed equally; they caution that the equitable distribution of such benefits must be addressed.

Research demonstrates that the challenges facing social entrepreneurs differ somewhat from those of commercial entrepreneurs (adapted from Thomaz & Catalao-Lopes, 2019). These include a) difficulty in attracting financing, often relying on public funding; b) lack of business model design that addresses the unique needs of social enterprises; c) lack of planning; and d) lack of human resources adaptive to a complex environment.

By its nature, social entrepreneurial activity (often referred to in earlier literature as community economic development or CED) addresses the inequities resulting from economic activity motivated primarily by profit (Silver & Loxley, 2008). Local people generate social enterprise development based on local needs and resources (Silver & Loxley, 2008). Jurgen Howaldt, Christoph Kaletka, and Antonius Schroder (2016) suggest that social entrepreneurs need to become more aware of their role and successfully negotiate collaborative, cross-sectoral relationships so that social enterprises may play a much larger role in "global prosperity" (p. 14).

The use of CED methods can empower people to address their own social and economic requirements and unleash "enormous creativity" (Silver & Loxley, 2008, p. 12), which may lead to gap-filling or even social transformation. Michele-Lea Moore and Frances Westley (2011) suggest that the difference between gap-filling, or adaptation, and social transformation is simply incremental levels of social change; this theory is supported by empirical research (Seferiadis, Cummings, Maas, Bunders, & Zweekhorst, 2017) that suggests longer-term development efforts "comprising small incremental, locally embedded changes and which recognizes the role of social capital" (p. 57) are key lessons for practitioners.

Moore and Westley (2011) argue that community capacity to create a system of continuous innovation leads to social and ecological resilience. Social networks, led by "institutional entrepreneurs" (p. 5) with a set of defined characteristics are deemed key to the development of such continuous innovation. Such characteristics include the capacity to recognize patterns that act as barriers to innovation; the ability to build and broker relationships through strategic visioning; the ability to reframe knowledge and discourse to engage others; and the ability to inspire, motivate, and empower network members.

Social enterprise research illustrates that dialogue is a key component in the creation of transformative social change through its capacity to build trusting relationships between a broad range of actors (Trivedi & Misra, 2018). The knowledge is deepened and enhanced through iterative cycles of dialogue that empowers participants and builds their collaborative community capacity. This collective wisdom fuels and further refines the iterative cycles of conception, planning, and action.

The cyclical nature of community-based research has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Etmanski, Hall, & Dawson, 2014; Greenwood & Levin, 2006 ). In their study of women's poverty alleviation in Bangladesh, Anastasia Seferiadis, Sarah Cummings, Jeroen Maas, Joske Bunders, and Marjolein Zweekhorst (2017) conclude that CBR's iterative process was key to shaping the project's characteristics, its impact, and identifying lessons for development practice.


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In sum, the literature review suggests that social entrepreneurial ecosystems may serve as a successful economic development strategy, particularly in regions experiencing economic crises, and as a strategy for addressing social disparities arising from dominant economies. Further, such ecosystems may also serve as catalysts and contributors to resolving pernicious social problems.

Key contributing factors for the development of social entrepreneurial ecosystems include

- The engagement of a diversity of actors in iterative cycles of conceptualizing, planning, and action;
- Creating spaces for ongoing dialogue that deepens relationships and builds social capital;
- The mobilization and transfer of knowledge, led by skilled knowledge brokers supported by research centres; and
- The empowerment of network members by focusing on building local economies designed with and by community members, often through incremental changes.

To date, however, there is a lack of both empirical and theoretical research related to social entrepreneurial ecosystems.

## RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT METHODS

Community-based research is a collaboration between community groups and researchers for the purpose of creating new knowledge or understanding about a practical community issue in order to bring about change. The community generates the issue and community members participate in all aspects of the research process. Community-based research therefore is "*collaborative, participatory, empowering, systematic, and transformative"* (Hills & Mullett, 2000, p. ii, emphasis added).

CBR was an obvious methodological choice for the project given the resonance of the above definition with the key factors required for the establishment of a social entrepreneurship network, as identified by the literature review, and with the SEE partners' overall goal of establishing such an ecosystem. Further, the iterative process of CBR—conception, planning, and action (Trivedi & Misra, 2015)—was expected to create the space for the ongoing adaptation of the methodology to respond to diverse community needs.

NORDIK Institute, affiliated with Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie, provided leadership to the collaborative, hosting the staff and guiding research and development activities. NORDIK's experience with CBR, its extensive research in the social economy field,[1] its interconnectedness with the undergraduate Community Economic and Social Development (CESD) program—which already integrated social entrepreneurship and social enterprise development into its curricula—and its extensive research and development networks in the region—including robust relationships with Indigenous and Francophone communities as well as other communities and organizations—provided a stable hub and foundation for development.

The development project was founded on collaborating partners' relationships across the region including funders, community-based organizations, social entrepreneurs, and researchers. The research and development process comprised two major cycles: the first iteration focused on developing an ecosystem to support youth social entrepreneurs (YSEs), and a second cycle emphasized broader social enterprise development and capacity-building among business and economic development officers that was aimed at promoting the sustainability of the ecosystem (ONE-SEP). Together, these cycles aimed at a) addressing the regional gap in social enterprise/entrepreneurship development, and b) ensuring the sustainability and resilience of an ecosystem that could address some of the social, economic, and environmental issues challenging the region.


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Research data was generated throughout the project by monthly teleconference calls between the collaborators, evaluations conducted by research staff at all community engagement events, and at annual and/or regional events. Observations, discussions, and participant feedback on the numerous activities associated with the development were integrated into further planning and action. Additional reflection was facilitated by staff and collaborators at the conclusion of each of the funding cycles and outlined in final reports to the respective funders.

The remainder of this section outlines the more significant processes and activities of the development of the ecosystem.

**Cycle 1: Social Enterprise Evolution (SEE)**

The research partners worked closely together over an intense six-week period spanning December 2012–January 2013 to develop a governance structure and funding proposal loosely based on a constellation model of collaboration (see Surman, 2006). The partners also adopted a collective impact model for evaluation (Kania & Kramer, 2011),[2] identifying NORDIK Institute as the "backbone organization." Funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation in May 2013, these structures were intended to provide guidance to the emerging community-university research collaborative as it aimed to develop an ecosystem to support youth social entrepreneurs (YSEs). The Figure below outlines the structure and key foci of the project activities.

**Figure 1: Structure of community-university research collaborative and key foci**


The first major research cycle spanned the period from September 2013–September 2016, when funding for the YSE component concluded, although ongoing efforts by NORDIK extended the work to March 31, 2017.

Researchers, using a focus-group process, conducted asset-mapping and learning activities in both geographic communities as well as communities of interest. Individuals, groups, and organizations interested in social enterprise/entre-


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preneurship development were brought together in "safe spaces" where they were provided with "social enterprise 101," an introduction to the concept, and then asked to identify "assets" related to the development of social enterprises. Through the ensuing dialogue, where facilitators encouraged participants to share their own experience and knowledge, participants usually identified several potential areas for social enterprise development in their communities. Researchers conveyed a written summary of these conversations back to the groups for action.

The most significant research activities from this cycle are outlined in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Cycle 1: Focus on youth social entrepreneurship**

| Ecosystem Development Area | Activities |
|---|---|
| Community-University Collaborative | • identified Theory of Change<br>• developed constellations<br>• monthly e-meetings & 3 annual symposia provided opportunities for dialogue and reflection, leading to planning and action<br>• community collaborators hosted/assisted asset-mapping & training activities, identified YSEs for "spotlight series," identified gaps and opportunities to advance project |
| Human Capital Development | • educational & training activities at high schools, community organizations, and events<br>• indigenous-specific project (Urban Indigenous Youth for Change) initiated and funded<br>• university-level course developed & delivered<br>• social entrepreneurship integrated into youth entrepreneurship training summer camps (CFDCs)<br>• advice & support provided to numerous social enterprises and social entrepreneurs on individual basis (telephone, electronic, face-to-face) |
| Social Capital Development | • asset-mapping activities in 8 communities<br>• 3 regional events (Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, Timmins) built relationships with policymakers, funders, and between YSEs and collaborators<br>• regional events and asset mapping connected YSEs with supporting organizations and funders, and developed definitions and identified resources<br>• participation in Ontario-wide network (Soscent 7) built relationships with other organizations sharing a common vision |
| Communications and Resources | • website development (bilingual and culturally appropriate) provided communications infrastructure including access to resources<br>• "spotlight series" in monthly newsletter furthered understanding of social entrepreneurship, social enterprises, and social innovation, and provided role models and mentoring<br>• SE101 developed and posted to website, delivered to numerous community groups across the region |


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**Figure 2 (continued)**

| Ecosystem Development Area | Activities |
|---|---|
| Access to Capital | • partnership supported one of collaborators to obtain a micro-financing program, Social Enterprise Northern Ontario (SENO), to support SEs (up to $15,000) across region<br>• allocation of SEE funds to 9 community-based SE start-ups<br>• links to numerous funding sources identified and added to website and advice provided by NORDIK interns as well as workshops for YSEs on funding applications |

**Cycle 2: Increasing sustainability through ONE-SEP**

Funding from a new source, Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Growth (MEDG), was obtained for another two years of CBR, commencing in April 2017. This second cycle of research, based on the identified need for greater ecosystem stability and sustainability, aimed at further developing the skills of business and economic development officers to support social enterprise development across the region; it engaged a second set of partners drawn from regional innovation centres, small business enterprise centres, and campus entrepreneurship accelerators. These new partners, comprising the Ontario Network of Entrepreneurs (ONE), expanded the mandate of SEE, refocusing the collaborative's efforts toward ensuring that supports were available to social entrepreneurs and innovators through existing government- and/or community-based services.

The most significant activities of this research cycle are outlined in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Cycle 2: ONE-SEP**

| Category | Activities |
|---|---|
| Community-University Collaborative | • monthly e-meetings designed for the planning and coordination of activities, integrate a learning circle component to build capacity with partners<br>• together, partners established a regionally specific definition of social enterprise<br>• over 40 partners including MEDG-funded services, as well as Ministry of Northern Development and Mines regional officers |
| Human Capital Development | • over 115 educational & training capacity-building activities at introductory and advanced levels<br>• Innovation Centres introduced categories of annual awards for "social entrepreneurs" and "social enterprises" of the year<br>• over 470 business and economic development staff were trained to provide support to social enterprise development and social entrepreneurs |
| Social Capital Development | • asset-mapping activities across the region, and included a train-the-trainer event for asset mapping<br>• 3 regional events (Sault Ste. Marie, Kenora, Timmins) built relationships with policymakers, funders, and between SEs and collaborators<br>• peer mentoring/coaching in an emerging field through the various activities – continuum of what peer mentoring means in Northern Ontario |


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**Figure 3 (continued):**

| Category | Activities |
|---|---|
| Communications and Resources | • website enhancement and expansion to reflect expanded mandate of collaborative<br>• 32 new training resources – webinars, presentations, workbooks, toolkits – tailored to needs of business service providers including topics such as business development, access to capital, scaling up, and social impact measurement |
| Access to Capital | • SETUP (Social Enterprise Training that Unites Peers) providing access to capital through CFDC<br>• Social Enterprise Procurement and Investment Readiness Fund (PIRF)<br>• SENO |

## DISCUSSION

There is substantial congruence between the factors found in earlier research to contribute to the development of social entrepreneurial ecosystems (i.e., knowledge mobilization, spaces for ongoing dialogue, diversity, and the empowerment of actors) and the goals of CBR (collaboration, participation, empowerment, systematic, and transformation). As noted, CBR processes provided numerous opportunities for reflection, including at the conclusion of the two major cycles but also at collaborators' monthly meetings, several regional events, and the conclusion of each community-based activity. The remainder of this section examines some of the key challenges confronted by the collaborative, and sheds light on how CBR methodology, particularly the iterative processes of planning, action, and reflection, supported resolutions to these challenges and fostered the development of a social entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### The engagement of a diversity of actors in cycles of planning, action, and reflection

Development efforts in Northern Ontario face substantial challenges in addressing its geographical and cultural diversity. The region's geography—with smaller cities, large rural areas, and numerous remote communities—combined with the cultural and linguistic diversity of Indigenous and settler communities, create unique social, economic, and environmental ecosystems. The engagement of actors reflective of this diversity in the ecosystem development processes was thus essential to its success.

From its inception, the collaborative included economic and business developers, nonprofit organizations, social entrepreneurs, and educators, as well as strong representation from the northeastern part of the region. Early reflections by collaborative members revealed, however, that focused efforts would be required to engage greater representation from the northwest region, Indigenous communities, and Francophone organizations in governance and decision-making. As a result, the steering committee was expanded beyond initial project partners to include representation from the Francophone community, an Indigenous business development organization, and a small business enterprise centre in Northwestern Ontario.

During the first year of activity, staff initiated a partnership with another OTF-funded initiative with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), representing 49 First Nations across Northwestern Ontario, resulting in the co-hosting of a two-day conference in Thunder Bay at the end of June. Participants at the conference took part in the planning and development of a mission statement for the ecosystem, as well as providing input on the website and communications strategy. They emphasized the need for Indigenous-specific role models and social enterprise examples and communications.


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Reflections by staff and collaborators following this event identified that although the project was attracting a great deal of interest and participation from youth across the region, greater cultural awareness and sensitivity was required to reach Indigenous youth and communities. As a result, an Indigenous-focused youth was hired who was able to identify, before the end of Year 2, additional funding sources to better engage with this cultural group, and Urban Indigenous Youth for Change (UIYFC) was born. This project within a project sparked many new activities, including asset mapping with youth in several First Nations; the development of numerous culturally appropriate activities and materials; and strongly linking arts, social enterprises, and Indigenous youth. The UIYFC project still continues, tackling tough issues such as environmental degradation (e.g., four Indigenous youth made public presentations at a bi-annual meeting of the International Joint Commission on Great Lakes Water Quality) and racism (UIYFC established a province-wide network of Indigenous youth leaders against racism).

Another key example of how the engagement of diverse actors addressed in iterative cycles of reflection influenced and supported the project's development was in increasing the ecosystem's sustainability. As funding of the first cycle drew to a close, the collaborators realized that individually, none of the partners had the capacity to fully support the training and communications infrastructure required for such a diverse and geographically disparate region, although there was strong belief in the value of such an agenda. The partners recognized that enhancing the services already provided to other types of entrepreneurs would best fill the sustainability gap, and providing such service providers with the training and resources to ensure their skills and confidence in service provision met the need. The project's focus shifted in Cycle 2, therefore, to supporting knowledge growth among business and economic development professionals. This was achieved by developing and delivering train-the-trainer workshops and resources, and by promoting such development through participants' various networks.

**Creating spaces for ongoing dialogue**

Previous research identified the need for ongoing dialogue that deepened relationships between the diverse partners and stakeholders, thereby developing greater trust (social capital) and leading to an increased facility to problem-solve through changing perspectives and using more diverse approaches. The SEE project's space for such dialogue led to strengthened support for individual social entrepreneurs, increased social capital, and the fostered integration of social enterprise development into more "mainstream" economic and business development.

Ongoing dialogue with YSEs during the first cycle of the project identified the need to have access to individualized support to assist them, particularly during the social enterprise start-up phase. YSEs found the processes of developing a business plan that incorporated social goals and measurement with financial viability to be very challenging, and they also found completing funding applications to be a frustrating task. SEE's budget and work plan was therefore revised to reflect the incorporation of two youth interns, renewed throughout the term of the project, who were trained to provide such support to YSEs. The interns provided a series of both face-to-face and online events to support YSEs in the development of start-ups and problem-solving, employing collaborators and social enterprise practitioners as "experts" to provide the YSEs with role models and, in some cases, mentors.

The CBR research activities, such as localized asset mapping, workshops, and seminars, brought together (both face-to-face and electronically) a diversity of people, sectors, communities, and organizations in ongoing dialogue that contributed to social capital development. Social entrepreneurs were able to speak directly with funders, business and economic developers, nonprofits, educators, and others in order to explore challenges, opportunities, and successes. This dialogue strengthened relationships that provided opportunities for SEs to access more traditional grants and loans addressing the significant lack of access to capital.


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The project created the space to strengthen a number of "weak links" with funding organizations, in particular, the relationships of various regional organizations with the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Further, government program and policy staff contributed to developing funding for the second phase of the project, which was obtained through the Ministry of Economic Development and Growth. The success of the project's first cycle attracted new federal partners to the second cycle, as well as greater interest from business and economic development officers and service providers.

The project's space for ongoing dialogue also assisted in integrating social enterprise and social entrepreneurship into more mainstream economic and business development. One of the "early adopter" collaborators, a representative from a Community Futures Canada (CFC) program, seized the opportunity the project provided to integrate social enterprises and social entrepreneurship into its mandate for youth entrepreneurship and enterprise development. Through reflections at the conclusion of Year 1, she sought support from SEE to assist her in including social enterprise/entrepreneurship into her CFC network's annual training events for youth. Again, the work plan was revised to incorporate these activities. Literally hundreds more youth (approximately 150 on an annual basis) were reached through this initiative.

**Knowledge mobilization and transfer**

At the project's commencement in 2013, one of its most daunting challenges became immediately apparent: terms such as social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, and social innovation were relatively unknown in Northern Ontario[3], and differing types of social enterprises (e.g., nonprofits, co-ops, First Nation-operated organizations, etc.) did not recognize themselves as related, thus eliminating networking that might have been highly beneficial. Further, feedback from project collaborators' initial meetings, as well as participants in early asset-mapping activities, identified this lack of awareness as a vital factor requiring swift remediation. Staff was thus obliged to focus efforts on addressing these priority needs.

As project collaborators expended valuable time and resources on refining their own knowledge, providing feedback to staff in developing and/or adapting essential resources and materials relevant to the region, and hosting or co-hosting activities, the governance of the project became more and more diffuse. The emergence of various knowledge mobilization initiatives received greater attention and resources. Collaborators were encouraged/supported to take leadership of various activities resulting, for example, in an asset-mapping activity with Indigenous youth which took the form of a one-day canoeing exercise, and the integration of social enterprise/entrepreneurship training into youth camps that had previously excluded the "social" component of youth entrepreneurship.

The involvement of the university's undergraduate program, Community Economic and Social Development (CESD), as a partner in the collaborative also provided crucial resources and benefits. The continual integration of academic-based knowledge into all communications, together with local knowledge generated by participant feedback, were then woven back into the development of resources. A specific course on social enterprise development was created and offered in the CESD program, and lessons learned were generalized and informed other university courses and curricula.

Given the vast geographic region of Northern Ontario, and the dearth of regional-specific materials and resources for SE development, significant project resources were allocated to the creation, development, and maintenance of an engaging web presence. The CBR participatory methodology enabled SEE to provide the necessary content for the website, with crucial feedback provided by collaborators, partners, funders, and participants in project activities, thereby ensuring that relevant content was created, adapted, and revised. Early feedback from collaborators and participants, for example, on their alienation from the social enterprise terminology and greater comfort with the term "change-makers," led to the adoption of "see the change" in the website address.


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One of the most vital components of ecosystem development was the website and monthly e-newsletter containing the Spotlight Series, which highlighted social enterprises from diverse cultural groups at all stages of development, with a wide variety of social missions and priorities. These spotlights engaged collaborators and other community members in identifying social enterprises in their communities, highlighting regional and cultural differences and providing role models for YSEs and, in the second cycle, business and economic developers. The SEs ranged from well-established organizations to start-ups, co-operatives to sole proprietorships, employers with multiple staff to volunteer organizations, and much more.

The second cycle of research provided an opportunity to strengthen and expand the training and development resources, with an emphasis on train-the-trainer materials for business and economic development officers. Feedback from participants in training sessions addressed specific needs, such as a resource manual for funding SEs, a facilitator's guide for SE asset mapping, and resources for scale-ups and social return on investment.

Reflections by the first cycle's project collaborators identified a learning community for collaborators as a priority, with such training becoming a regular agenda item at virtual meetings in the second cycle. These training sessions included areas such as scale-ups, social return on investment, and funding opportunities, as the skills and knowledge of the collaborators grew and advanced. The collaborators also provided feedback on topics for webinar development that were delivered during the second major cycle.

**The empowerment of network members by focusing on building local economies**

Previous research on social enterprise ecosystem development and CBR both emphasize the need for community empowerment. Certainly, in a region as geographically and culturally disparate as Northern Ontario, it was clear that the development of such an ecosystem could only be achieved through the engagement and empowerment of many diverse actors across the entire region. Asset mapping—a key tool in community economic development—served as a foundational tool for empowering local networks to develop plans to address local economic development through their unique historical and cultural lenses. Evidence of participant empowerment was demonstrated by the emergence of an increasing number of actors taking leadership roles in mentoring, financing, and supporting ecosystem development.

Asset-mapping activities (see Figure 2) built social capital within communities across the region, as local groups came together at the behest of collaborators and learned about one another's aims, priorities, skills, and resources. Together, the groups explored opportunities for social enterprise development, and community reports generated by project staff and volunteers assisted them in analyzing their readiness to begin. The strengths-based approach supported confidence building and created a welcoming environment for individuals and smaller, sometimes fledgling, organizations. Asset mapping also created opportunities for people interested in SE to find an initiative to support. Several communities were able to initiate start-ups as a result of these sessions, while others generated planning input for decision-makers.

Access to capital was identified as a crucial component for extending social enterprise development across the region. Early in the project, one of the partners, PARO, was able to lead the development of a new combined grant/loan program called Social Enterprise Northern Ontario (SENO). At the conclusion of the first round of funding, a review of applicants revealed that the eastern region of Northern Ontario was not well represented. The cyclical nature of CBR allowed for the integration of this knowledge into the following year's work plan, with the result that promotion and support in accessing the program in that underserved area was provided within the first funding cycle of SEE and throughout the second cycle.

Feedback from both collaborators and participants encouraged the reallocation of some of the project's funds in Year 3 of the first cycle to direct social enterprise support. This small investment (approximately $10,000) provided support to


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nine community-based SE start-ups, again extending the reach of the project into some new communities, and in some cases, building on asset-mapping activities to strengthen and deepen the project's roots. One CFC partner collaborated with NORDIK and a small business enterprise centre to deliver SE business-plan training to a cohort of nine SEs with the CFC providing access to funding once their business plans were completed. One of these SEs was able to secure over $500,000 to start up a chocolate factory employing new immigrants to Canada.

As more traditional business development agencies developed relationships with SEs, saw their benefits to the regional economy, and grew confident in their skills to both identify and support SEs, their willingness and capacity to work more closely with this non-traditional sector of the economy grew. This became more and more apparent as business and economic development officers have taken on larger roles in supporting SE development, including, for example, hosting interns, hosting regional meetings focused on SE development, hosting annual awards and recognition for social entrepreneurs and SEs, and collaborating on the development of peer funding circles.

**Conclusion**

As Marcia Hills and Jennifer Mullet (2000) suggest in their definition, the research processes of CBR are crucial to its proposed outcomes (i.e., collaboration, participation, empowerment, and transformation result from engaging, listening, reflecting, planning, and acting in a way that is respectful to community/network members). The literature on social entrepreneurship ecosystem development implies that a similar and/or related set of processes is necessary (i.e., creating spaces for the community engagement of diverse actors, ongoing dialogue, knowledge co-creation, and empowerment through a specific economic focus). In this case study, the well-documented CBR cycle of planning, action, and reflection supports the goals of both; they might even be considered to have been essential components in its relative success.

The five-year CBR longitudinal study, with its iterative cycles, created the space for networking between and among the various stakeholders. Development activities employed tools such as opening and closing "circles" to various activities; eliciting evaluative feedback at workshops, seminars, and other face-to-face or online gatherings; and annual and regional symposia and conferences. These methods sparked and strengthened new and existing relationships throughout the cycles, allowing staff and collaborators to re-engage community members again and again. This deepened levels of trust among and between geographically and culturally distinct communities, communities of interest, and organizations and funders.

Each of the areas identified in Figure 1 (i.e., governance, human and social capital development, communications, and access to capital) benefitted from the integration of solutions to gaps or needs identified by participants' reflections on the previous cycle(s). This ongoing integration of new insight into the project's work plans and activities was crucial. As documented above, it changed the focus and direction of the entire project, as well as the eventual outcomes. Certainly the relative success of the overall project may be attributed to the emergent nature of the collaborative's learning and its willingness to redirect efforts in creating a supportive ecosystem for social enterprise/entrepreneurial development.

This research confirmed earlier findings that some of the key factors in developing social entrepreneurial ecosystems may be processes employed to engage and empower communities in finding solutions to inequitable and/or failing economies. The findings of this research also suggest that using CBR methodology, with its cycles of planning, acting, and reflecting, may be a preferred tool for developing such ecosystems. In this case study, dense social and knowledge networks emerged that mobilized social enterprise development, sparked community capacity building, and attracted new resources to the sector as its profile and success grew. Network participants demonstrated empowerment as they took leadership in identifying gaps and new resources, started and scaled up enterprises, shared their knowledge and experiences, and obtained recognition for their successes.


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Building a social entrepreneurship ecosystem across the region required the participation and collaboration of a broad range of the region's citizens, organizations, communities, and leaders. Their engagement and empowerment have rooted social enterprise as an alternative model of economic relations and provided Northern Ontario with an opportunity to transform its economy to one that promotes greater equity, inclusivity, and respect for the environment. The ecosystem, if its success continues, may lead to greater resilience for the region and may point similar regions to new processes of economic development that will ultimately result in social transformation.

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## NOTES

- Gayle Broad, former director of NORDIK Institute, was the Northern Ontario lead in the Linking, Learning, Leveraging: Social Enterprises, Knowledgeable Economies, and Sustainable Communities, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded project in collaboration with the Centre for Cooperative Studies at the University of Saskatchewan.
- It should be noted that when this research was initiated, the topics of constellation governance and collective impact approaches were still in development, and there was a much less extensive literature than is available today.
- In fact, Katie Elliott, lead for the YSE cycle of the research, indicated at her employment interview that she had conducted a Google search on these terms combined with Northern Ontario and got absolutely no "hits." An indicator of the project's success was that by the conclusion of the first cycle, a similar search yielded over 100 "hits," with all of them related in some way to this research project.

## WEBSITE

SEE, https://seethechange.ca/

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# Representative Board Governance: What Role Do Nonprofit Board Directors Have in Representing the Interest of Their Constituents?

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## ABSTRACT

The current ethos of most nonprofit boards of directors focuses on role clarity between board directors and the executive director. The board's role is to collectively set strategic direction and provide oversight while leaving day-to-day operations to staff. Yet, many individual directors join a board to make an impact on the organization by addressing very specific operational concerns and/or to represent a stakeholder group, and this creates tension at the board table. This article explores whether there is necessarily a trade-off between the representative and good governance roles of a nonprofit board director. It will demonstrate that the tension between representing member interests and governing nonprofits is a false dichotomy. Reconciling these two interests offers some potential avenues for improved organizational accountability.

## RÉSUMÉ

La plupart des conseils d'administration pour les organismes sans but lucratif (OSBL) tiennent à ce que le rôle des membres du conseil soit distinct de celui du directeur général. Le rôle du conseil est d'établir l'orientation stratégique de l'organisme et d'en assurer la supervision tout en confiant la gestion quotidienne au personnel. Souvent, cependant, les membres se joignent à un conseil en vue de résoudre des problèmes opérationnels très précis ou de représenter des partis pris spécifiques, ce qui peut soulever des tensions. Cet article explore s'il y a nécessairement incompatibilité entre le rôle de représentation et celui de bonne gouvernance sur le conseil d'un OSBL. L'article démontre que la tension entre la représentation des intérêts des membres et la gouvernance d'un OSBL s'avère être une fausse dichotomie. De surcroît, réconcilier ces deux intérêts pourrait avoir comme effet d'améliorer la responsabilité organisationnelle.

**Keywords / Mots clés:** Governance; Board of directors; Agency theory; Representation; Nonprofits / Gouvernance; Conseil d'administration; Théorie de l'agence; Représentation; Organismes sans but lucratif


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## INTRODUCTION

Members of boards of directors bear the ultimate responsibility for the success and viability of an organization (Chait, Ryan, & Taylor, 2011; Gill, 2005; Ricardo-Campbell, 1997). For the many small nonprofits run by volunteers, this might be quite direct as they are performing much of the nonprofit's day-to-day work. As a nonprofit grows, however, and the board indirectly manages more resources and an increasingly complex stakeholder network, the nature of this relationship changes. Governance theory suggests the boards of directors of nonprofit organizations should fulfill this responsibility by setting the organization's strategic direction and providing fiduciary oversight, without wading into the organization's operations (Carver, 2006; Chait et al., 2011; Drucker, 1990; Gill, 2005). In contrast, agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) argues the central purpose for the board of directors is to represent the interests of the organization's owners. Since nonprofits do not have residual claimants, the rights of "ownership" in a nonprofit are weaker than in a for-profit or cooperative model (Hansmann, 1980). However, when the membership communicates its concerns to the board of directors and to individual directors, these concerns are typically expressed as operational issues (Carver, 2006; Danielson, 2017).

Since most boards have developed models that separate board members from involvement in operational matters, addressing member concerns is considered the role of management. Yet, agency theory argues boards must ensure management is acting in the interests of the membership. Fulfilling the board's obligation as agents of the membership is, therefore, a challenge within the common governance systems practiced by boards of directors of nonprofit organizations, yet these issues of representation are of critical importance to them. This article's key research question is this: Is there necessarily a trade-off between a director's role as an effective representative and as a good governor in a nonprofit organization?

This article will demonstrate that the tension between representing member interests and governing nonprofits is a false dichotomy. Since many of the services being delivered by nonprofits are being done so on behalf of governments, understanding how representation functions in the nonprofit sector helps to explain how well democracy is functioning at a local level. The theoretical underpinnings of this article will draw from agency theory to analyze the main nonprofit board governance models used in Canada and assess how they approach the issue of a potential representative role for directors. This article incorporates insights from Albert Hirschman's (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* to argue for a more direct incorporation of representation into nonprofit boards.

## NONPROFIT GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNMENTS

The consequences of ensuring good governance in nonprofits is important and ties directly into their evolving relationship with governments. Revenue from governments in Canada accounted for about 50 percent of the $169.2 billion in economic activity generated by the nonprofit sector in Canada in 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2019); Statistics Canada (2019) has broken down the nonprofit sector into three categories, providing information on the percentage of revenue each category receives from the government. Community nonprofit institutions received 30.8 percent of their funding from the government. Government nonprofit institutions received 72.9 percent of their income from government sources. While business nonprofit institutions received only 1.4 percent of their funding from governments. The sector receives funding from all levels of government—federal, provincial, and municipal—to deliver services through 2.4 million employees (Imagine Canada, 2006). Government is increasingly working with the nonprofit sector as a mechanism to outsource services and in recognition that governments need partnerships to solve the most complex problems facing society (Phillips & Levasseur, 2004). Thus, in many ways, nonprofit organizations are becoming an extension of government services (Hall & Reed, 1998), and this has implications for how citizens in society exercise their democratic voice. Indeed, this has critical implications for the governance of those nonprofits themselves, as directors whose primary impetus for joining a board is to represent a particular group of constituents—an exercise in democratic voice—take on a broader mantle of governance responsibilities to serve the organizations whose boards they join.


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Theories of the welfare state and theories of the voluntary sector are inadequate to explain why the government relies so heavily on the nonprofit sector to deliver services (Hall & Reed, 1998; Salamon, 1987). Theories of the welfare state suggest that market failure coupled with government failure can explain much of the nonprofit sector: when the market cannot provide a good at a socially optimal level, but the good cannot command support from a majority of voters, then the nonprofit sector often fills the gap. However, what this approach misses is that most nonprofit sector funding comes from government sources (Salamon, 1987). Theories of the voluntary sector suggest nonprofits exist to address a contract failure problem that occurs when the service recipient and the funder of the service are not the same people (Hansmann, 1980; Salamon, 1987). In these circumstances, it is either impossible or overly costly for a donative funder to directly observe service or product quality (Hansmann, 2013). The lack of direct quality assurance means that service providers could shirk service delivery to reduce costs and increase profits. Because of this possibility, the non-distribution of profits that the nonprofit legal form imposes provides an assurance to funders that resources will not be funnelled from service quality toward dividend payments. Yet, government funding often is tied to extensive regulations and reporting mechanisms, suggesting the non-distribution constraint is insufficient as a quality assurance tool (Levasseur, 2018; Phillips & Levasseur, 2004; Salamon, 1987). Lester Salamon (1987) proposes "third-party government" (p. 29) as the explanation for nonprofit activity along these lines. From this perspective, nonprofits are a mechanism for providing programming across large geographic areas while differentiating services according to local needs. By contracting different nonprofits to offer local services, these services can meet the needs of the local population without creating political difficulties. In many cases, the services are provided by organizations that were helping those in need before the government began trying to address the problem. This contracting also avoids the need for the duplication of organizational structures; governments provide representation at the system level by ensuring that services are provided to constituencies and do so without becoming involved in specific service delivery. Governments attempt to ensure delivery meets their requirements through complex accountability agreements, legislation, and regulations, thus ensuring services are delivered in a way consistent with the government's wishes (Levasseur, 2018; Phillips & Levasseur, 2004). This allows elected officials to say they are meeting community needs without risking being blamed for the dissatisfaction that some people feel about how that need is being met. Instead, day-to-day complaints will be directed toward the nonprofit organization's board and staff, rather than toward government and elected representatives. While this outsourcing may solve problems for elected politicians, it moves questions of representation to the nonprofit sector. However, these issues vary depending on the type of nonprofit organization in question.

## TYPES OF NONPROFITS

Before delving into issues involving democratic representation and the government contracting of nonprofits, it is important to categorize the different types of nonprofit organizations and to understand both the basic functions of their governance and how these functions relate to a given organization's membership. Nonprofit boards are governed by a board of directors. The board of directors is "an organized group of people with the authority collectively to control and foster an institution that is usually administered by a qualified executive and staff" (Houle, 1990, p. 6). How these boards are formed varies depending on the type of nonprofit organization in operation.

First, it is worth considering the size of a nonprofit's board of directors. Mel Gill (2005) notes that smaller nonprofits require their boards of directors to be much more involved in the operations of the nonprofit. Many small nonprofits do not have staff and therefore rely exclusively on volunteers to do the work of the organization. Typically, these small nonprofits' boards are made up of a few individuals who happen to volunteer for the organization in other capacities. Often, little thought is given to the board functions, as board members for these nonprofits are primarily focused on the organization's work, rather than governance. However, Gill (2005) notes that even in these circumstances it can be helpful for the board to divide matters into those that involve governance and those that involve operations. In this way, the role of the board and the role of the volunteer staff member can be distinguished. Larger nonprofit organizations typically do not


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face these challenges, as the staff and board function are clearly separated. However, depending on the operating approach of the board, this is not always the case.

Larger nonprofit organizations can be divided by placing them on two axes: donative versus commercial nonprofits, and mutual versus entrepreneurial nonprofits (Hansmann, 1980). Donative nonprofits primarily receive income from donations, whereas commercial nonprofits charge for goods and services. On the other axis, mutual nonprofits are primarily controlled by the members who benefit from their goods or services, and entrepreneurial nonprofits are primarily led by self-selecting and self-perpetuating boards. These spectra provide four categories of nonprofit organization: "1) donative mutual; 2) donative entrepreneurial; 3) commercial mutual; and 4) commercial entrepreneurial" (Hansmann, 1980, p. 842). Donative mutual organizations may be charitable (serving an altruistic purpose) or member servicing (e.g., fraternal organizations) in their orientation. In practice, charitable organizations may have a formal membership that is a small subset of clients or community members interested in the organization. In these circumstances, other stakeholders may be considered part of the moral ownership (Carver, 2006).

The self-selecting board of a donative entrepreneurial nonprofit holds the moral leadership of the organization perpetually and will often expand the board of directors to include different communities and skill sets to bolster this leadership. Here, once again, the moral ownership of the organization is likely broader than the formal membership. Commercial mutual organizations are typically owned by a group that uses the nonprofit's services (i.e., the membership). Finally, commercial entrepreneurial nonprofit organizations receive funding through service delivery and have a self-perpetuating board of directors. Many of the largest nonprofits, including hospitals and universities, use this structure. The formal membership of these organizations is the self-perpetuating board of directors. However, the moral ownership is broader and includes many other stakeholders. Throughout this article, any reference to the membership of an organization is designed to include the formal members as well as the moral ownership, which includes stakeholders who access services, donors, volunteers, and community members who support the existence of the organization. Due to the unique structure of nonprofits, nonprofit boards should treat these moral owners in the same manner as formal owners of an organization would be treated according to agency theory.

## THE PRINCIPAL-AGENT PROBLEM

Recognizing that organizations are simply legal fictions, it is logical to ask: Why do organizations require boards of directors?

The role of the board in managing principal-agent problems is critical to answering this question. In businesses, principals invest capital in companies to make a profit. It is in the managers of a company's self-interest to maximize their own salaries and benefits, even if this comes at the expense of the investors. Yet, the managers need the investors' money to successfully operate the business. The agency problem, therefore, causes the principals to monitor and control the behaviour of the agent, and these activities have a cost (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). The boards themselves are agents of their principles, and the process of electing them is intended to allow the principals to exert their control.

In the nonprofit sector, donations generate an additional source of principal-agent tensions because those who purchase goods and services are generally not those who consume them (Olson, 2000). Because of this, donors are not aware of the quality of services provided to the recipients, and thus they require a monitoring function (Brown, 2005). The restrictions of a nonprofit structure provide some check against this donor-consumer issue by limiting the potential financial rewards for directors and managers who might shirk their obligations and reduce the quality of their outputs to take the gains as profits (Hansmann, 1980). This is not to suggest that nonprofit boards do not perform important governance functions. With mutual organizations, for example, the clients themselves elect the board to perform the quality-check function. In entrepreneurial organizations, by contrast, the ownership is murky, as both the funders and client can be seen as owners.


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The funders have a clear expectation that their services will benefit the clients, while the clients have an obvious interest in receiving effective services. Issues of voice and exit among funders and clients thus become relevant.

## POWER AND REPRESENTATION

In a seminal work on democratically structured, member-based organizations, Hirschman (1970) introduces three concepts—exit, voice, and loyalty—and these are highly relevant to the success and democratic representation of nonprofit organizations. Exercising voice is a mechanism by which a customer, client, or donor can attempt to achieve change. The other option for dissatisfied individuals is to exit an organization. The exit option means that a customer, client, or donor has chosen to either not exercise voice or to stop exercising voice and stop using the organization's goods or services or to stop donating. The exit option may mean that the voice option is not used. This is a major risk for institutions, as a silent exit means the organization does not learn about its problems and therefore does not correct them. Hirschman (1970) explains this issue using a hypothetical public school where students leave for a charter school; this exodus causes the public school to deteriorate further instead of fixing its problems. Individuals who feel a strong sense of loyalty—often active volunteers in many nonprofits—then become an important mechanism of feedback for the board of directors and management of an organization, as exercised through their voice. It is in an organization's self-interest to build and enhance the loyalty of its members by being responsive to their wishes. When this occurs, it increases the likelihood of further feedback and creates a virtuous cycle where loyalty leads to increased voice and a decline in exits. Unfortunately, in practice, short-term interests often negate this virtuous cycle. The board, therefore, should be especially attentive to the voice and exit actions of the organization's membership, as the exit of members can indicate that management may not be effectively responding to issues facing the organization (Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

In circumstances where an organization is not responsive to members' interests and substitution options exist, members—including donors and clients—will exit the organization by withdrawing their patronage or support. If substitutes do not exist, as is often the case in the nonprofit sector, the membership will attempt to exercise its voice. If this voice is not heard, the organization will lose members, who will either join other nonprofit organizations or leave the nonprofit sector entirely. When a nonprofit organization's membership has few exit options, it also increases the importance of reputational risks. If member voices are not heard internally, it is likely that they will voice their displeasure about the organization externally. This can impact donations for donative nonprofits and sales for entrepreneurial nonprofits. If these actions force an organization to become more responsive to the membership, it will likely be in the long-term interest of the membership and organization. It is the role of the representative director to rise to this challenge, which will be discussed shortly. However, before explaining the challenges the representative director faces, it is important to understand how the role of the board is understood according to current governance paradigms.

## THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

Fundamentally, a board of directors exists to govern an organization. Georg Von Schnurbein (2009) explains that the role of the board is to provide "global leadership and ensure completion of the organization's purpose, legitimacy, and accountability" (p. 100) as well as internal and external stakeholder relationships. This approach contrasts the strategic and oversight role of the board with the role of staff members, who are responsible for day-to-day operations. While it provides protection for politicians and governments, this approach raises issues of representation for individuals receiving services from nonprofit sector organizations. If the government is providing services by outsourcing them, how can democratic mechanisms ensure these services meet the community's needs?

Scholars have developed numerous categorization schemes to show the different ways boards of directors approach their governance role. There are key legal duties board directors must consider in their performance. They have a duty


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of care, which involves making informed decisions on behalf of the organization; a duty of obedience to ensure the organization stays aligned to its mission and articles of incorporation; and a duty of loyalty, which requires acting in the best interest of the organization (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012). This duty of loyalty is also often referred to as a fiduciary duty to the organization. Beyond these core requirements, the appropriate role of a board is quite contested among scholars, policymakers, and practitioners.

In defining broad approaches to nonprofit governance, different scholars draw different boundaries. Stephen Block (2014) breaks out three approaches to governance: a traditional hierarchical model taken from Cyril Houle (1990), a policy governance approach taken from John Carver (2006), and non-traditional approaches that involve more flexible approaches to decision-making and authority. Alternatively, Pat Bradshaw, Bryan Hayday, Ruth Armstrong, Johanne Levesque, and Liz Rykert (2007) classify five approaches to nonprofit governance: Carver's (2006) policy governance model, which focuses on means-ends distinctions; constituent representation, which is focused on representing key stakeholder groups; entrepreneurial, where the board outlines means, ends, and limitations; emergent cellular, which focuses on ad hoc organizational teams; and a proposed vector model, which integrates elements of the other four. Gill (2005) lists nine types of nonprofit boards: 1) operational, 2) collective, 3) management, 4) constituent representation, 5) traditional, 6) results-based, 7) policy governance, 8) fundraising, and 9) advisory. He suggests these board types run on a continuum from most involved in operations to least involved. While these classification schemes each has differences, they all mention the traditional approach and Carver's (2006) policy governance model, which is where this review begins.

Under the traditional model, the board of directors would play a role in overseeing operations alongside its governance role. Committees were typically developed to mirror staff functions (Gill, 2005). In this approach, boards would commonly become involved in operational matters related to programming, finances, and human resources functions (Gill, 2005). The chair was typically a powerful role, often serving as the primary reporting relationship for the executive director.

The policy governance approach was developed by Carver (2006) in the early 1990s as a response to the traditional approach. A board using policy governance focuses on the distinction between ends and means; the board decides the organization's ends, and the means to achieve those ends are left entirely up to the staff. By defining governance as primarily focused on achievement and the avoidance of behaviours, Carver (2006) provides a clear role for the board and a clear role for management, though the ends-means distinction still leaves a role for boards to interact with external parties.

The results-based approach is of particular interest, as it likely the most common model in use by Canadian nonprofit organizations that have formalized governance structures, though it may not always be referred to by this name. The results-based approach tries to craft a balance between Carver's policy governance model and traditional approaches (Gill, 2005). The results-based model does not use some of the more complex elements of the Carver model (such as stating all policies in the negative), and it does not require the board to stay fully out of operations. In the results-based approach, boards can become involved in times of crisis but board involvement in operations is typically limited (Gill, 2005). Essentially, the results-based model and the Carver model seek to focus boards on strategic issues.

Peter Drucker (2005), echoes the emphasis on strategy for a results-based board. He provides a list of three things that create successful governance in a nonprofit. First, the organization requires a clear governance structure that is focused on adhering to the organization's mission and achieving results. This first point, therefore, highlights the importance of strategy. Second, the organization needs both an effective board and an effective executive officer. Third, the organization needs a collegial relationship between the board and the executive officer. This collegial relationship is important to note when exploring how a board of directors can perform a representative function without interfering in operations.


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Before exploring operations, Gill's (2005) seven functions of a board should be highlighted: 1) establishing the mission, 2) providing financial stewardship, 3) overseeing human resources, 4) monitoring performance, 5) community representation, 6) managing risk, and 7) ensuring proper management during times of organizational crisis. Two items on this list—monitoring performance and community representation—tie into the role of a director as a representative. Community representation, according to Gill (2005), involves the promotion of the organization, representing community interests at board meetings, ensuring stakeholder representation during the nominating process, and "facilitating stakeholder input to planning" (p. 64). These four sub-functions of community representation demonstrate that, according to results-based governance, boards should play a role in representing membership interests as one of their core functions. A great deal of research suggests that strong board governance and organizational success are related (Bradshaw, Murray, & Wolpin, 1992; Brown, 2005; Green & Gerber, 2008; Herman & Renz, 1997, 2000; Olson, 2000). But effectiveness as a direct result of monitoring performance is not as straightforward as it may seem since different stakeholder groups determine organizational effectiveness using different criteria (Herman & Renz, 1997). Consequently, for boards attempting to evaluate organizational performance, the process must be done in a manner that allows for diverse viewpoints to be heard and understood. Yet, it often creates tension when a board has a director focused on responding to these diverse views.

## THE CHALLENGE OF REPRESENTATION

When a customer, client, or donor of a member-driven nonprofit is dissatisfied with organizational performance, they may seek to join its board of directors. Yet, conflict often arises within boards when new directors join the board with the expressed goal of representing constituents or implementing a platform. Houle (1990) highlights that when board directors join on a platform, they are often not aware that the responsibilities of the board go beyond addressing one or two specific issues. This type of board director, one who joins a board with the goal of implementing a platform or representing a group of constituents or stakeholders, will be defined as the *representative director*. The representative director believes part of their job is to represent the viewpoint of groups of stakeholders at board meetings. This viewpoint will be a subcomponent of the wider set of beliefs brought to the role. Therefore, the representative director may range in overall performance from a high-functioning director to a serious problem for the board. For example, a director elected with a focus on adding a new program who has no interest in discussing anything else can be a serious problem. Alternatively, a director wishing to focus on adding a new program who also recognizes this advocacy must be conducted within the confines of the duties of care, obedience, and loyalty may be an asset to the board.

In a lengthy list of problems with some board directors, Houle (1990) includes two potentially related to the representative director. The first concern involves board directors who join a board with minimal interest in the role of governing but a high level of focus on one or two issues the organization faces. In these circumstances, the board director is simply not contributing enough, and this leaves the rest of the board to pick up the slack. The second concern involves directors who "may have specific interests or motives that adversely affect their judgement or that cause them to use their positions to gain unfair or underhanded advantages" (p. 17). These directors make decisions that create a personal gain, which is a clear violation of their fiduciary duty. However, Karine Levasseur (2018) echoes these concerns in a study of nonprofit daycare providers that shows how difficult it is to ascribe motives to directors. She shows that some directors make decisions for personal, rather than professional reasons. At times, however, a board director may not be motivated by personal gains but because they believe the interests of a group they represent are not being addressed by the organization. Neither type of problem board director discussed by Houle (1990) is limited to the representative board director, but these problems may be more common among representative directors.

Drucker (2005) opposes the very idea of democratically electing boards. His chief concern is not the election process itself but that the process leads to directors running on platforms rather than being selected for the skills they can bring to the board. Houle (1990) argues that establishing the voice of client services may be important through client councils,


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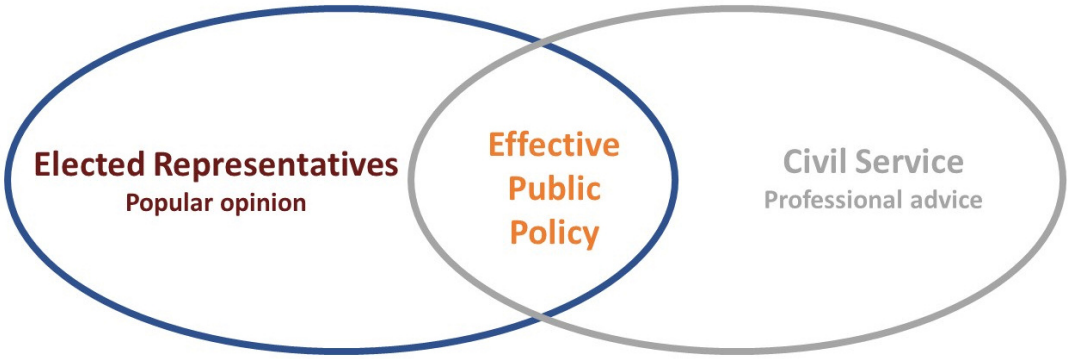
but the board itself is not the appropriate place for clients themselves to sit, as they may represent their own niche stakeholder community rather than the organization as a whole. Though not opposed to the presence of clients on boards, Alan Broadbent and Franca Gucciardi (2017) raise the difficulty for directors in distinguishing what is in the best interest of the organization from what is in the service recipients' interest. Since a board director's legal fiduciary duty requires focusing on the organization's interest, this problem is especially pressing. Despite raising concerns associated with clients serving on boards, Broadbent and Gucciardi (2017) highlight the importance of a board being "connected to the people it is serving and includ[ing] their voices in its work" (p. 89). This raises a question as to why the client's perspective is important. If it is as important as implied, the representative board director, whether elected or appointed, would seem an ideal mechanism to provide the voice of the people an organization serves at the board table.

Much of this criticism may be the result of over applying a corporate governance model in which a small group of shareholders are effectively able to hire and appoint all the directors to a nonprofit context. In the corporate realm, much of the core expertise of governance is expected to exist primarily on the board itself. Yet in a nonprofit context, this may not be wholly appropriate if different stakeholder groups are to be represented. A completely different set of models coming from elected governments, particularly local governments, is built around representatives who do not have all the required financial and legal expertise (see Figure 1). As a consequence, civil servants in municipal governments become adept at providing expertise framed in plain language, which allows elected representatives to support effective decision-making. In this model, the civil servants provide expert technical advice and the elected representatives focus on being responsive to constituents' interests (Fenn & Siegel, 2017).

**Figure 1: Municipal public policy development**




*Source:* Fenn & Siegel, 2017

## ADDRESSING THE REPRESENTATIVE DIRECTOR

The necessity of being attuned to the needs of membership is a common theme in governance models. In the policy governance model, which is a useful example as it has the clearest distinction between governance and operational tasks, understanding membership interests is recognized within the "linkage to the ownership" (Carver, 2006, p. 199) function. Carver (2006) recognizes the importance of the board representing the interests of the ownership, suggesting boards should ensure they have mechanisms to hear the concerns of the membership. He argues that directors should "abstract up" (Carver, 2006, p. 243) an operational concern to a board-level strategic concern with an example:

> [If] the board is worried about late-working employees going to their cars in a dark parking lot, it would abstract that concern up to its value about endangering staff in any way. The next level above that one might be the board's value about prudence and ethics with regard to staff in general, but it is likely to have already covered that broad issue. having thus abstracted up a little too far, the board would then come down just a little and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> discuss the policy that would deal with the highest form of the issue it has not yet addressed (general endangerment). (Carver, 2006, p. 243)

Unfortunately, the policy governance model's complexity makes it difficult for board directors to understand how to place an item appropriately on the agenda for discussion. A new board director, in particular, may find it difficult to contribute; this makes it likely that a representative director will become frustrated and a disruptive, rather than constructive, influence on the board. Understanding this complicated practice is simply not realistic to expect from new board directors. Instead, an experienced board director—ideally the chair—should help the new board director work the issue from the low-level concern up to a higher-level issue that can be understood at the board table when using the policy governance model.

While results-based governance may make it easier for newly elected representative directors to contribute, there is still a steep learning curve for new directors. The chair of the board, the executive director, and other experienced directors still have an important role to play. It is incumbent on the board as a whole to create an environment where the representative director has constructive avenues to voice concerns about the organization. The representative director needs latitude in sharing concerns without immediate attempts to silence their view or persuade them that what they are asking for is not possible. At times, particularly early in a new director's tenure, these concerns will be operational in nature and out of scope for the board of directors. In these circumstances, the board's chair should help the director understand what the board's function is and what is out of scope as purely an operational concern. The executive director also plays a role in creating a climate that welcomes insights from directors. An effective management team should view information from the representative director as valuable insight into member perspectives and consider if this new information about operational issues changes the approach that should be taken. Finally, the board should strive to understand what governance issues are behind the operational concerns of the representative director. Ultimately, the board's goal should be to create a trusting environment where all directors feel comfortable sharing their viewpoints. The willingness and desire to change is perhaps the greatest gift the representative director brings to an organization. The representative director, even if unsuccessful in achieving their platform, is driving the organization forward by being open to change.

There is a caveat: Just because someone shares personal characteristics with a segment of stakeholders, it does not mean their voice necessarily represents that group as a whole. Instead, this person brings a perspective that is informed by their life experiences. It is also possible for someone to represent a stakeholder group to which they do not belong. These people may not share the experiences of the stakeholder group or be able to communicate what the stakeholder group faces directly, but they can still challenge the board to consider the needs of a stakeholder group that is being neglected. The board should ask questions such as: "How would these stakeholders frame the issue and define a successful outcome? What would each group regard as a worst-case scenario?" (Chait et al., 2011, p. 129). In these circumstances, it may require additional effort on the part of the board to reach out to stakeholders so their voices can be directly understood. But if a representative director can get the board to take on this task, they will have represented their constituency group's interest and served the interest of the organization.

## CONCLUSION

According to agency theory, a central role for boards of directors is to ensure the interests of the ownership are paramount in the considerations of management. A strong linkage between the ownership and board provides a valuable tool for ensuring that an organization can fulfill its purpose. While the concept of ownership in the nonprofit sector may not be as clear, this is not an excuse to ignore the important linkages that should exist between the board and the ownership, whether that ownership is the membership, the donors, the clients, the customers, the broader community, or some other group. Indeed, defining an organization's moral ownership can be a valuable task for boards of directors to undertake (Carver, 2006).


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Further research is needed to examine how the separation of operational issues from governance among boards of directors intersects with agency theory. Practical implications should be a major focus of this research. Scholars should begin by examining how nonprofit sector directors conceive their role when representing the ownership. What conflicts do they experience when trying to represent the membership, donors, clients, and/or customers? Researchers should also attempt to develop a list of case studies, tools, and approaches that nonprofit sector organizations are using to respond to and enhance the voices of the ownership. Recommendations from this research could help boards of directors develop new approaches to representing the interests of their ownership.

Further research should examine how the tension between representing ownership and governance manifests itself in the cooperative and municipal sectors. The literature examined here primarily dealt with the nonprofit sector (including nonprofit cooperatives). However, for-profit cooperatives would likely experience many of the same challenges. Municipalities and school boards also warrant special attention. While they technically fit within the category of nonprofit organizations, the election of school board trustees and city councillors through citywide elections makes them unique cases for exploration.

Modern governance theories suggest there is a tension between representing member interests and adhering to governance requirements of nonprofits. However, this distinction is a false dichotomy. Boards can better serve their organizations by representing the membership while adhering to modern governance theories.

Typically, board directors who join a nonprofit for representative reasons are interested in contributing to the organization. Representative directors join the board to make a difference and serve the organization. These directors' efforts can become disruptive if the board is not effective at giving the representative director a voice and guidance. This is particularly common when an issue is brought forward by a representative director, and it is unfortunate because this misplaced debate causes boards to waste energy on triviality when they have an opportunity to make a positive difference. Instead, boards should directly address the principal-agent problem by providing a voice for client stakeholders within the organization. Boards seeking to fulfill their fiduciary obligations would be wise to consider the underlying issues brought forward by representative directors. When a representative director brings up a governance issue, the board should provide space on the agenda to discuss the issue. Even operational concerns raised by representative directors warrant consideration, albeit not in the same way. These issues should be explored for the underlying value that is driving the issue. While the issue itself may be operational in nature, there is almost always an underlying policy or value that has led to the operational concern. In this sense, the representative director has a role that incorporates elements that are similar to those of an elected non-partisan city councillor. When the representative director is heard, rather than being treated as a problem director, they have provided a necessary voice for members, prevented organizational exit, and built loyalty among clients.

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